

NOTHING BUT
KILL LA KILL
ESSAYS

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, my friends introduced me to the new hit anime *Kill la Kill*.
I hated it.

In 2016, I stuffed a bunch of the 100,000+ words I'd dedicated to writing about the show into a hefty book.

What happened?

Who knows, but what you're reading right now is the result! Just over two years of love and enthusiasm fill up these 350-some pages of 80+ essays, all split up into ten sections: Character Relationships, Comparisons to Other Media, Design Choices and Symbolism, English Dub Script, OST, OVA, Ryuko and Senketsu, Specific Moments, Tag Essays and Quick Posts, and The Discourse. As may be obvious from such a list, the heart of much of this writing is—just as the series itself—Ryuko and Senketsu, but I'd hope there's a little something here for every *Kill la Kill* fan.

Thank you to everyone who has supported me over the years. I couldn't have put this together without all the encouragement I've received. Everyone who's sent me asks and inspired me to keep yapping—you're the reason this book exists! I've grown so much as a writer because of this community and through putting together this collection, and I cannot express how grateful I am for that.

Special thanks too to **h0saki**, who has provided scans from various *Kill la Kill* books, and to **mikiryuko**, who has provided fans with translations of un-localized *Kill la Kill* material, as well as all the anonymous contributors who have provided similarly. I couldn't have done many of the essays here without your work!

While essentially a masterpost of the posts I've made concerning this series, this book is also a little more than that in that it features revised and updated writing, additional commentary, and, well, it's all put in one nice, handy, convenient place. However, it's far from *everything*, and does not include all the many great *conversations* I've had, so if for some strange reason anyone's ever thirsting for even *more Kill la Kill* talk, there are still always the analyses pages on my blogs.

Thank you for taking a look! I hope you enjoy.

Notes and Links

h0saki: <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/>

mikiryuko: <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/>

marshmallowgoop: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/ramblings#klk>

fuckyeahryuketsu: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/directory>

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CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS

AIKURO AND KINUE

Anonymous asked: Everyone actually in KKK who knows Ryuko seems to be a Ryuketsu. Like Mikisugi's whole stock in the show is that if Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship is true, Kinue gets proven right.

One thing that I've always loved about *Kill la Kill* is that Ryuko and Senketsu have this relationship that's supposed to be impossible, yet they prove everyone wrong. By the end, Satsuki—who had once deemed their friendship a “fairytale—completely supports them. Even *Tsumugu* smiles when Ryuko and Senketsu get back together after Ryuko forcibly tears Junketsu off. In fact, just about the entire (heroic) cast is rooting for them by this point, and are overjoyed to see them working together again.

Aw.

But more importantly here, I love your mention of Aikuro, because I find him such a deeply fascinating character.

At its heart, *Kill la Kill* is a story absolutely driven by personal motives. Satsuki wants to stop Ragyo not only to save the world, but to avenge her “dead” younger sister and father. The Elite Four—particularly Gamagoori—are also invested in the greater good, but the root of their willingness to fight is their loyalty to Satsuki. Ryuko, too, enters the narrative not looking to be a superhero, but to learn more about her dad.

So there's this good moment early on where Ryuko questions Aikuro's intentions. How *does* he know what he knows, and why? He's honestly one of the biggest mysteries the show has to give you initially—he clearly has information, but he's dragging his feet on giving it out. Still, he answers Ryuko when she questions why. He's doing what he does to save the planet from the Kiryuin's tyranny.

I don't doubt this is true. But I also don't believe it's anywhere near the full story. While he may have gotten into the whole Nudist Beach business for such a broad reason at first, his insistence and determination to keep going with it seems to point to something more deeply personal. After all, he doesn't even seem to know Ryuko, so why is he so concerned for her plight? Why does he fuss over her and want her to succeed with Senketsu so badly, while his coworker Tsumugu wants the complete opposite?

In episode 5, we learn that Tsumugu is—as is fitting for the show—

motivated by personal reasons. And as it turns out, extra materials¹ provide some detail for Aikuro's own motives, too. He was once some cocky, stuck-up scientist, but then he meets Kinue, Tsumugu's sister, who must've been one heck of a woman. She lightens him up and he learns to have fun with life; somewhere along the way, the two become romantically involved and even get engaged. But... then she dies horrifically in one of their work experiments.

So once we get to the series proper, we have these two characters—Tsumugu and Aikuro—who both have lost someone very dear to them, but handle this loss incredibly differently. Tsumugu finds his sister a fool, and everything she believed in stupid and worthless. Aikuro, conversely, follows through with Kinue's will. Her dying words were to keep going with the Kamui experiments, which Isshin/Soichiro does, ultimately creating Senketsu. Considering how he writes a letter to Aikuro to introduce Ryuko to Senketsu, he seemed to know he wouldn't be able to do it himself... which puts Aikuro in an interesting place. Instead of orchestrating Ryuko and Senketsu's meeting, Aikuro could have destroyed Senketsu on the spot. This is surely what Tsumugu would have done. But he doesn't.

I almost think Aikuro's role in the show gets overlooked a lot. Literally none of it would have happened if he hadn't opened up the trap door. Ryuko was in the right place at the right time, but there's practically no way she would have met Senketsu if someone else hadn't planned it. I find it pretty interesting that the English dub seems to draw a bit more emphasis on this than the original script, though it's a recurring element in both. Aikuro is incredibly dedicated to bringing Ryuko and Senketsu together, and maintaining that they stay that way.

And I do think it's for Kinue as you say, Anon. Aikuro notes in episode 5 that Kinue believed humans and clothes could be friends, so Ryuko and Senketsu are the ultimate way to prove it. Senketsu is the final result of the experiments that Kinue died testing, and instead of believing it's all hopeless as Tsumugu does, I say that Aikuro chooses to believe in her and her dream. To get more headcanon-y, I think there's also a compelling thread here about Ryuko resembling Kinue in some way, which just adds to Aikuro's desire to help her. After all, in the third Drama CD, Tsumugu notes that Aikuro “favor[s] Matoi and support[s] her too much,”² and, well, I don't know about anyone else, but my mind instantly goes to angst-land about how Ryuko looks like Aikuro's dead fiancé...

Regardless, Aikuro is one of the few characters to regard Senketsu's humanity at all, and probably the only one who supports Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship the whole way through. And why wouldn't he, when that relationship is the living embodiment of everything his lover fought for?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 15, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/122737398140/everyone-actually-in-klk-who-knows-ryuko-seems-to>

1. <http://sushiobunny.tumblr.com/post/97595928890/some-information-from-the-kill-la-kill-compre>
2. <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/post/93554866295/from-drama-cd-vol-3-track-4-tsumugu-you-favor>

MAKO AND GAMAGOORI

I love the relationship between Mako and Gamagoori.

I'm not even talking shipping. I just wanna talk these two characters, becoming friends over the course of the series. It's a development that's *filled* with some really good stuff that I know I want to see more of in the media I consume, but I can really boil it down to one thing that I appreciate so much: how their interactions—while not always positive, true—are all about building respect and trust.

The very first time they're interacting together onscreen hits at this right away. This is the start of episode 4, in which Gamagoori insults Ryuko's pajamas as being unacceptable school attire and Mako *stands up to him* to defend her. It's a common argument to say that Mako is terrified of Gamagoori, which would thereby make their relationship far from anything good, but this very first scene shows that to be the furthest from the truth. One of the biggest points here is that Mako is *not* afraid of Gamagoori in the slightest—which is something that Gamagoori greatly respects. His backstory reveals that he's someone all about justice and doing what's right, and we see him stand up to those in positions of power because he views them as wrong and abusing that power. So to see Mako doing the same regarding him is something he thinks very highly of. He's the one with the power now, Mako disagrees with what he's doing, and she doesn't even hesitate to tell him so. Right from here, Gamagoori instantly finds himself respecting this no-star student that no one really respects at all. At the end of the scene, he promises he'll remember her name.

Later interactions between the two build on the ideas set up in this initial encounter. In episode 8, Mako shows once more that she's not intimidated by the "enemy" Gamagoori with how eager she is to accept his offer for a ride home, and we see that Gamagoori still holds her in high regard, admiring her philosophy about living a life where "traffic signals always shine yellow." By the Naturals Election arc of episodes 9-11, they're interacting a lot more and building up a sort of friendship. Mako is shown to be completely comfortable around Gamagoori here as well; she doesn't hesitate to stand up to him again regarding Ryuko, and she has absolutely no qualms about sitting on his shoulders to watch the fights. Though I could see more arguments here about Mako's fear of Gamagoori with how she's upset by Gamagoori's demand that she get off his shoulders, I would argue once more against it.

It's actually one of my favorite moments when Gamagoori tells Mako to get off of him, because it represents a couple of things to me.

For one, it shows us that Gamagoori isn't some nasty Nice Guy™ who has absolutely no self-worth and no backbone regarding Mako, which would indeed make their relationship poor if it were true. What Mako does makes him uncomfortable, but he doesn't just take it because he likes and respects her. He tells her what's wrong and voices his discomfort, showing that he also wants to be treated with respect—very crucial in any relationship! Mako is upset by his outburst, yes, but this isn't due to fear. Largely, she doesn't like a lot of conflict and tension, even self-describing herself as someone who “hates fighting” in episode 13. This is why she's also shown uncomfortable when Houka and Gamagoori start bickering later in the arc, and why she has a similar reaction when Ryuko and Tsumugu go at it in episode 16. But on top of that—and most significantly here—I'd argue that it also shows that she *does* genuinely care about and respect Gamagoori's feelings, and that she doesn't want to upset him. After all, she's absolutely *comfortable* around this guy—enough so to hop up on his shoulders!—which shows that she does enjoy him and his company at least on some level. So when we see her on his shoulders again near the end of the arc, I take it to mean that this time, *she asked* and was respectful towards Gamagoori, just as he does (and should!) want.

And I don't know about anyone else, but this is exactly the kind of stuff I like to see. I love how Gamagoori doesn't brush off his discomfort just because he likes Mako and thinks she's cool. I love how Mako listens and cares that she upset him. In fact, that's another aspect that's interesting about these episodes regarding these two characters. For practically the entirety of it, Mako and Gamagoori are chatting and sitting together... despite being on opposing sides. Mako could have easily moved somewhere else or run away from him if she didn't like him or was scared, but she doesn't. Though they're rooting for different causes and they squabble some and don't always agree, this is made out to be *friendly*, light-hearted, and not negative at all. They aren't portrayed as enemies, but as friends. Additionally, while Gamagoori admires Mako greatly, he never reaches the point of blind idolization where he's just agreeing with everything she says so as to appear more favorable to her, and the same goes for Mako towards him—they are always honest with one another, and when they disagree or need clarification, they *talk about it*, listen to each other, and sincerely care about what the other

has to say. In short, they both respect each others' viewpoints and each other, even if they're not agreeing. To Mako, it doesn't matter that this guy is "against" her and doesn't share all her opinions—she still likes hanging out with him anyway.

Which is great! How often do we see it that thinking differently from someone else equates to a personal attack, or the idea that these people can't be friends, as though we must only form meaningful relationships with those that think exactly like us? Not only does this sound boring, but it's also incredibly untrue. With Mako and Gamagoori, we get this—they respect their differences, get along, and enjoy their time together.

The Naturals Election episodes also really highlight Gamagoori's respect for Mako even more. He admires how she can boil down Houka's complicated jargon to something understandable, and cheers her on when she proudly admits that she's an underachiever, but still should be respected and called by her name.

By episode 18, it's another one of my absolute favorite moments when Gamagoori *trusts* Mako to evacuate the people from the stands during the Festival, because Mako is so used to not being trusted or respected by anyone. Ryuko's constantly telling her to stay out of it (even once promising her *snacks* if she does), and her allies at Nudist Beach are similar, with Aikuro consistently shocked when Mako does anything helpful at all, such as when she successfully supplies Satsuki's plan to the Elite Four to stop Junketsu!Ryuko in episode 21. But Gamagoori wholly believes in Mako and finds her capable of saving the people—something even she's shocked at, since she's not used to being treated that way. It's more up to interpretation than anything, but I do sincerely believe that Mako really takes Gamagoori's respect for her to heart, and that it inspires her. After Gamagoori's "death" in episode 24, she's shown kicking major amounts of ass—enough that Aikuro comments once more about being surprised about it—as though to live up to what Gamagoori thought of her.

I made this whole thing quite a bit longer than I intended, but I just can't stress enough how important this is to me. Respect and trust are absolutely *crucial* in any relationship, and when we have so many stories romanticizing the lack of it, it's just so, *so* great to see budding friendships like Mako and Gamagoori's where the points of respect and trust are huge and prominent and the very core of their relationship. I hope to see so many more like these two.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 4, 2015

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/123194677287/i-love-the-relationship-between-mako-and>

Tags: #mako's whole character arc is a lot like senketsu's #like him she's also used to being called names ('stupid') and not being respected #and she struggles with feeling like she's important to anyone #i mean she's SHOCKED when ryuko says in episode 22 that she loves her just as much as she loves senketsu #and so much of that is honestly due to how she's treated #people don't take her seriously and belittle her constantly #but gamagoori never does #and it doesn't matter how you take their relationship #that's just really freaking important

MAKO AND SENKETSU

Anonymous asked: I know this blog is mainly based on Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship. But what do you think Mako and Senketsu's relationship is? Like, good friend? guardian? brother?

It's hard to say... I suppose I go over it a bit on page 259, "Episode 15: "Senketsu and I are two in one."" Essentially, though, I don't think Mako even acknowledges Senketsu as a real person until the end of episode 15. Before that, she only seems to see him as an object that Ryuko talks to because she's lonely, and nothing more.

What this means is that any interactions where both parties are seeing each other as *there* are very limited, so their relationship unfortunately doesn't get to go very far. By the end, they're only just getting started, but I think there are still some developments between them that are interesting to talk about.

From Senketsu's side, he seems... pretty confounded by Mako initially, and he distances himself from her, too. Though Senketsu is likely present just about every time Ryuko and Mako interact, he doesn't consider Mako his friend. Mako is *Ryuko's* friend, the one *Ryuko* loves and is fond of. In episode 10, he even says as much: "Apparently *your friend* is cheering for herself." Not his friend. Not even "Mako." He sees himself as so utterly distant from her, and can't wrap his head around her, either.

(And as an aside, I'm always rather amused by how he seems kinda irritated by Mako's impression of him in episode 5, looking at her very coolly. Pfft.)

Once Mako sees Senketsu as a person, though, their relationship changes drastically. For once, Mako thinks of *his* feelings. Ryuko can't say those awful things to Senketsu in episode 20 not only because it's entirely uncharacteristic of her, but also because it hurts Senketsu, too. Senketsu, who is alive and has thoughts and feelings and emotions just like anyone. It's a big moment for the two of them when Mako *finally* talks to Senketsu as a person later in the episode, asking how *he* feels. After this, Senketsu appears much fonder of Mako. In episode 21, he finally calls her by name, and he doesn't hesitate to protect her life with his own.

If they had gotten more time together, I think they could have been really good friends. Their character arcs are actually surprisingly similar. Mako

grows up lonely and the subject of constant belittling and disrespect, and her story is a lot about how she *can* do things, she *has* power, she's *not* useless and an impediment to everyone. Senketsu is also lonely and stigmatized and struggles to feel like he's important to anyone, and by the end he sees that he's a person and he *matters*. They both gain respect for themselves and grow from it; though their personalities are wildly different, I think they'd really get along well and understand one another in that sense.

But as they are in the show? I can't really see them as anything but acquaintances at best. People who want to get to know each other better, but never get the chance to.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 30, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125491404585/i-know-this-blog-is-mainly-based-on-ryuko-and>

RYUKO AND JUNKETSU

Anonymous asked: Ryuko and Senektsu's relationship vs Ryuko and Junketsu's relationship and how they affect her while wearing them? Cause I feel like they both made her feel happy just in completely different ways.

Okay, so maybe this is a strange question, but have you ever seen *Princess Tutu*? It's a really wonderful magical girl series and I'd definitely recommend checking it out if you haven't, but in regards to this discussion, there is a crucial element from the show that seems highly relevant: *"May those who accept their fate be granted happiness. May those who defy their fate be granted glory."*

This honestly describes the Junketsu situation perfectly. When Ryuko is forced into Junketsu, she's told that it's her fate to serve clothing, to be worn by them, and that doing so is the "ultimate happiness." But... this isn't what Ryuko truly wants, and her so-called "happiness" is actually the farthest thing from it. In my writing on the opening scene to episode 21 (page 284), I discuss this concept:

Essentially, Ryuko has been robbed of everything that makes her *her* in the start of episode 21. She's become exactly what Ragyo wants her to be, which is why she obeys Ragyo's every word and why she kisses Nui. She's become so absolutely lost to herself that she does things she would never, losing all her freedom and personality to become nothing more than a pawn stuck in a state of fake happiness. This is noted directly later in the episode:

Satsuki: Junketsu is wearing *you*, nothing more.

Ryuko: And what's wrong with that? Being worn by it feels so amazing I can't stand it! Human beings were born to be worn by the Life Fibers. Being worn by 'em is a feeling you can't believe—the ultimate bliss!

Satsuki: It is the bliss of being a slave!

Later on, when we get to the wedding-crashing scene, there is this exchange between Ryuko and Mako:

Ryuko: If you try to ruin my happiness, I'll straight up kill you!

Mako: You think this is happiness? Not even! Take a look around you! This isn't you!

And at the very end:

Mako: You're such a dummy! Okay, fine! Kill me if you want! If staying cooped up in here is what you want, then go on and kill me and quit being Ryuko too!

So, Ryuko's "happiness" when wearing Junketsu is made out to be a lie—a fabrication, just like the fake memories she was supplied with. She's entirely lost who she is, reduced to a puppet who's *told* that she is happy, who's *told* that this is what she should want, because it's what she's *supposed* to want—it's her destiny, and the destiny of the entire human race! And, well, to accept that makes everything easier. After all, fighting fate and screwing destiny is hard and difficult and it hurts. It's easier to just smile and do as you're told.

In my mind, Junketsu doesn't make Ryuko happy one bit. What Junketsu does is trick her into *thinking* she's happy, which I do think is a very crucial distinction. In my Episode 21 Opening analysis, I outline this distinction, describing it as the difference between "true happiness" and "easy happiness." When we apply these concepts to Ryuko and her relationships with Junketsu and Senketsu, Senketsu clearly makes Ryuko *truly* happy, whereas Junketsu does not:

...this [opening] scene is also a huge contrast to Ryuko's interactions with Senketsu. Though they too may have been fated for each other, Ryuko *never* wears him for that reason, but because she actively *wants* to because he's her best friend. This is why we see her rejecting him when she doesn't want to wear him, and why she's always herself when they're together. With Senketsu, Ryuko doesn't give up any of her free will or personality and just accept him because some big force is telling her she *has* to; she sticks with him because she genuinely enjoys him and his company. So, on another level, I see this scene as also showing the difference between true happiness and the "easy" happiness. Just blindly accepting your fate may be the "easy" route, but it's also tragic and manipulative and not true to who you really are. Challenging that fate can hurt and it's hard, but it also means a lot

more. Ryuko says this herself in episode 22 when she claims, “[Senketsu] feels way better, and way warmer, than that monster Junketsu ever did!”

I think it’s also worth noting that the song episode 21 takes its title from—Hiromi Go’s “Incomplete” (“Mikansei”)¹—is all about a womanizer who had broken up with his girlfriend, only to realize that he’d abandoned his true love. (Supposedly. This is going off of what I’ve heard, so take with a grain of salt.) And what does Ryuko do at the end of the episode? She realizes that being with Junketsu isn’t real happiness, and she risks her life tearing it off so she can be with Senketsu again.

So, let me tie it all back to that *Princess Tutu* quote. “*May those who accept their fate be granted happiness. May those who defy their fate be granted glory.*” Ryuko may feel happy when she’s with Junketsu, but those feelings are shallow and superficial. And it’s hard, with Senketsu. She struggles with being seen with him, embarrassed about how he looks. She struggles with opening up to him so they can be good partners. They argue and bicker ~~like an old married couple~~. But at the end of the day, she also gets everything she’s ever wanted through being with him. As Ami Koshimizu² (Ryuko’s Japanese voice actress) puts it, Ryuko gets someone who is her friend, family, and lover all in one with him.

And for Ryuko, who wants love and a family more than anything? That’s the true victory, the *true* happiness, and more meaningful than anything she could ever get with Junketsu.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 3, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125790379915/ryuko-and-senketsus-relationship-vs-ryuko-and>

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-R3jCKNECU>
2. <http://pastebin.com/DRStHfFY>

SATSUKI AND SENKETSU

Can I just elaborate on Satsuki and Senketsu's friendship potential for a sec?

There's just a lot of good/interesting stuff going on between them:

- Senketsu (maybe) canonically calls Satsuki “beautiful,”¹ and is full of praise for her: “Can you imagine the strain [Satsuki’s] putting her body through, just to activate me and fight? No other human could accomplish that! No one except Satsuki Kiryuin!” It really gets to me that Satsuki thinks he must hate her before they work together, because even after everything, he seems to admire and think highly of her.
- Senketsu is totally super ISTJ and Satsuki is totally super INTJ so they’ve got these really similar personality types. On that line, they’re both the calm and “blue” to Ryuko’s hot-blooded “red.”
- A friendship between them is just *so fascinating* with Satsuki’s history. Satsuki hates Life Fibers. She thinks they’re evil. She thinks having a symbiotic relationship with them is a “fairytale.” And can you blame her? With what her father tells her, she has every reason to believe that Life Fibers are the reason her mother is horrible and her father and sister are dead. It’s a terrible bit of irony that Life Fibers didn’t actually kill Ryuko but kept her alive, and there’s so much stuff to explore with that. But there’s also so much with Senketsu. She probably thinks he’s just like Junketsu at first; when she offers Ryuko to rest between matches in the Naturals Election arc, you might say it’s because she knows the strain a Kamui puts on the body. (Wearing Junketsu, after all, is *not* easy.) For her to come to understand that someone who is “100% Life Fibers” is actually kind and sweet, and to then work with them? It’s just so *huge* for her.
- And, really... they’d just get along super well? They can’t even speak to each other when they work together to save Ryuko, but they can still synchronize and make a good team. On that vein, I think there’s also a lot to say regarding their dedication and love for Ryuko. Maybe I’m stretching it, but I see a bit of a connection in Senketsu and Satsuki’s

behaviors in episodes 15 and 24. In episode 15, Senketsu tells Ryuko to get a hold of herself as she falls unconscious during a fight, and he then saves her via his jets. In the final episode (24), Satsuki tells Ryuko the same thing as she falls unconscious after Senketsu's death, and then catches her.

Considering Senketsu's character, he's mainly only seen in relation to Ryuko. And I mean, don't get me wrong, I *love* Senketsu and Ryuko's relationship and love focusing on it, but I think there's just so much to explore regarding Senketsu's relationships with other characters, too.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on November 4, 2015

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/132530043202/for-day-23-of-satsucis-30-day-kill-la-kill>

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBUnOEqzx>

SENKETSU AND CHARACTERS OTHER THAN RYUKO

whinydevil asked: I know you're a ryuketsu kinda gal mainly (and I know you've made a post about the ot3 [page 30]) but ryumako is so Good to me. Ryumakoketsu (gee that's a mouthful) or w/e is the best of both worlds imo. They're Ryuko's two most precious friends. They get her better than anyone else. And they get so close to her in what seems like such a short amount of time (tho that could just be the lightning pacing). Mako and Senketsu may be at odds with each other but always come together for Ryuko

Also – It's a little sad to me that we didn't get to see Mako and Senketsu interact a bit more and see their relationship evolve—and that Mako doesn't realize Senketsu's "humanity" until much later on.

If there's one thing I'm dying for more of from *Kill la Kill*, it's more of Senketsu interacting with characters who aren't Ryuko. ~~(Another thing is a Kinoue prequel. I want this so bad it's not even funny.)~~

Of course, I *love* Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship, I think that's more than obvious, but I wish Senketsu—a *main character*, if not the second-most crucial one to the narrative—would have had more of a chance to establish himself as a person separate from Ryuko. Because as much as I'm irritated when he's not tagged when she is, I can begrudgingly admit that there's basis behind it (aside from the whole not-looking-human thing, which probably accounts for most of it). Senketsu is, in many ways, a part of Ryuko. They're practically always together, and even in the end, there's a sense that he *still* is. He's a character absolutely defined by his loyalty to her, and that's fine, it works, I love him, but I still would have really enjoyed *more*. Senketsu is *more* than just Ryuko's outfit, after all.

That's part of why the Drama CDs¹ are so good to me. Especially in CD 4, there's a lot of Senketsu on his own, and a lot of Senketsu interacting with other characters on his own (particularly, Aikuro). The earlier CDs are more light-hearted, and allow some cute downtimes between him and Ryuko that I think establish him more as his own person. The CDs in general are filled with a lot of character moments that you miss in the series, and I'm still holding out on the slim hope that they'll be dubbed² one day...

But really, Senketsu interacting with other members of the cast? It's so appealing to me. Senketsu would have a lot to talk about with Gamagoori, since both are characters who are so about loyalty—and you could have a lot of humor in this, too, since Senketsu is disturbed by Gamagoori's way of fighting³, and Gamagoori doesn't approve of how Senketsu looks when synchronized. I've already written a bunch about Senketsu and Satsuki (page 24), because I really do think they would get along *super well* and that there's a fascinating arc here when you consider Satsuki's feelings towards Life Fibers. I love what little we get between Senketsu and Sukuyo (Mako's mom) in the series and Drama CDs, and seeing more of Senketsu's protective side as he butts heads with Barazo (Mako's dad) and Mataro for their mistreatment of Ryuko would be great, too. (I'm particularly fond of the moment in episode 19 when Senketsu loses his temper briefly after Barazo comments that Ryuko's healing abilities aren't human, especially because Drama CD 4⁴ shows us that Senketsu *knows* how much the revelation that she's not exactly human hurts Ryuko after she falls unconscious desperately trying to convince herself that she is.) Perhaps there could be some similar situations with Aikuro, but Aikuro is also interesting in that he recognizes Senketsu's humanity throughout practically the whole show, understands his significance to Ryuko probably better than most of the cast, *and* Aikuro's fiancé died testing what was presumably a prototype of Senketsu while insisting that they don't stop the experiments.

I could really go on and on and on with this, but bringing it back around to Senketsu and Mako, I was super pleased to see character designer Sushio drawing some cute fanart⁵ of them frolicking together beneath cherry blossoms—presumably in some strange, post-series universe, since cherry blossoms come out in spring and Senketsu... didn't really live that long.

Perhaps it was also a sort of companion piece⁶ to an image of Ryuko and Mako together, also beneath the cherry blossoms?



They're all dating each other.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on April 27, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/143510971420/i-know-youre-a-ryuketsu-kinda-gal-mainly-and-i>

Additional commentary: Poor Senketsu seems to have allergies, though...

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/131261347980/kill-la-kill-resources>
2. <http://crazyscissorbitch.tumblr.com/post/133259659684/so-uhh-alex-von-david-the-english-vo-director-for>
3. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125552916730/transcript-kill-la-kills-episode-previews>
4. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/94470325010/from-the-fourth-drama-cd-which-goes-more-in-depth>
5. <https://twitter.com/sushio/status/718379232414588928>
6. <https://twitter.com/sushio/status/717472647789936641>

SENRYUMAKO

You know, yeah, Ryuketsu is my super OTP, but like. SenRyuMako is a great OT3? I mean...

- In episode 22, Ryuko states straight out that both Mako and Senketsu are “more than friends.” I’ve always argued that this is a super cool moment that says you *don’t* have to be in love with someone in order for that relationship to be important (page 111). But. *But*. If you *do* wanna go the romance route, this is like... kinda explicit confirmation that (as of episode 22, at least) Ryuko’s feelings for Mako and Senketsu are the same.
- If you take the “Senketsu’s Date with Ryuko” card¹ to be canon, Ryuko’s canonly gone on dates with both of them.
- Mako loves Senketsu? Yeah, she starts off kinda not really understanding that he’s there, but by the end of the series, she goes out of her way to assure him that she gets how he feels and is completely and totally supportive of his relationship with Ryuko (page 259). (She also is like, *the* biggest Ryuketsu shipper². Just sayin’.)
- And Senketsu loves Mako? Or at least *really* takes to heart how much Mako means to Ryuko? He jumps out to save her life when Nui could have killed her in episode 21, and further protects her life with his own just after³, doing *everything* in his power so the brainwashed, Junketsu!Ryuko won’t hurt Mako because he knows that would absolutely *break* her.
- And, like, Mako and Senketsu have rather similar character arcs (page 19)? They both gain respect for themselves after a history of being belittled and mocked and feeling like they don’t matter to anyone. They’re really different people, but they have a surprising amount in common and would get along well because of it?
- Ryuko means the world to both Senketsu and Mako. Ryuko is Mako’s first real friend, there’s a whole backstory about how significant this is in the form of “Mako’s Story” included in *SUSHIO CLUB LOVE LOVE*

KLKL, she has the songs “Light your heart up” and “New World Symphony” that are all about how much Ryuko means to her, she’s utterly dedicated to Ryuko and puts herself in harm’s way for Ryuko’s sake, she’s totally attracted to Ryuko and thinks she’s super hot... And then Ryuko is also Senketsu’s first friend, he has the character songs “Till I Die” and “Suck your blood” (and a shared character song with Ryuko in “Before my body is dry”) that are all about how much he loves her (though “Suck your blood” (page 127) isn’t really true to his character or the nature of their relationship...), he’s *always* there for Ryuko and never betrays or abandons her... And again, these two mean the world to Ryuko, too; though she’s grown up lonely and bullied and afraid to open up her heart, she *lets these two* in, and she says flat out that she loves them more than words can describe.

- Ryuko also says in episode 22 that she’s “never taking Senketsu off ever again.” So, like, as long as Senketsu’s alive, if you’re shipping Ryuko with someone, you’re also shipping them with Senketsu. Sorry, I don’t make the rules. (And Mako would be *so totally cool* with this? She *loves* Ryuketsu!)

tl;dr SenRyuMako is a great OT3 spread the word.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on April 1, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/142104230480/you-know-yeah-ryuketsu-is-my-super-otp-but>

1. <http://ws-tcg.com/en/cardlist/list/?cardno=KLK/S27-PE02>
2. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/105204578685/mako-mankanshoku-supporting-ryuko-and-senketsu>
3. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/131396328825/and-that-is-why-i-will-not-let-you-lay-a-hand-on>

COMPARISONS TO OTHER MEDIA

“CRADLED IN LOVE”

Anonymous asked: (For that other anon [page 37]) You want a song that really fits Ryuketsu? Cradled in Love by Poets of the Fall, for after Senketsu dies, from his view.

I’ve actually never heard this song before, but taking a listen now, yeah, I can definitely see it.

There’s the real obvious connections—Ryuko’s “blue note sapphire eyes” and the line “So with the fire still burning bright, I wanna gaze into your light”—but where it really hits me with Ryuketsu feelings is just what I see as the main message behind the song: someone being dead (or gone in some other sense), and not wanting his lover to cry over it.

This fits Senketsu so well because a lot of the narrative surrounding Ryuko and Senketsu’s relationship deals with the concept of *not crying*. This first comes up in episode 13, after Ryuko gives in to rage and goes completely berserk against Nui Harime. Here, she tells Senketsu:

Ryuko: You were crying when all that went down. You were pulled into my mind as I rampaged out of control, got pumped full of rage-filled blood, had more power than you wanted pulled out of you, and you broke down and cried. Even then, I could tell how bitter your tears were.

What’s notable here is what she focuses on. It’s not the fact that she wreaked absolute havoc. It’s not that she could have killed someone. It’s not even that she could have killed *herself*. No, what bothers Ryuko most about the whole situation is that she couldn’t control herself and *she made Senketsu cry* because she couldn’t. She hurt him, and she’s terrified of ever hurting him like that again.

This is something that really seems to eat at her, because she brings it up once more in episode 17, where she assures Senketsu:

Ryuko: Don’t worry. I won’t lose control again. I won’t make you shed any more bitter tears.

So when Ryuko crosses paths with Nui for a third time in episode 18 and most certainly *could* lose control, it’s pretty stinkin’ significant that she

doesn't. Nui gleefully taunts her, but through it all, Ryuko remains devoted to her promise. Determined to control herself, she's able to let the anger go, presented visually to the audience with this wonderful shot:



And why is Ryuko able to do this this time around? It's exactly as she says in episode 15:

Ryuko: I'll live for the desire of what's almost in reach regardless of the rage that's almost in reach! The desire to take back my friend! To protect the friends that are precious to me!

She won't give in to rage because that rage only hurts the very friends

she's trying to protect. But most significantly? Last time, that rage hurt her friend so terribly that he *cried*. She can control herself so well here because if she doesn't, she knows that could happen again—and that terrifies her.

Come episode 20, the tables are turned. For the first time, Senketsu understands what it's like—and what Ryuko went through—to witness a loved one so hurt and upset that they're in tears. After Ryuko leaves in a huff, he says:

Senketsu: Ryuko was crying. Suffering and resentful... This time, she was the one who was crying bitter tears.

Her actions in this episode affect him so profoundly that he even says to be “[sinking] into depression” in the extended episode preview¹, but just like Ryuko, note what he focuses on. Not that Ryuko said she'd never wear him again. Not that she called him a monster. No, it's that she was so upset and hurt that he saw her *cry*. Ultimately, same as Ryuko, it is *that* which causes him the most distress.

Episode 22 adds another element to this crying theme with the idea of happy tears—“tears of joy,” as “Cradled in Love” would put it. Senketsu bursts out in these tears after Ryuko compliments him profusely, to which she responds with a bit of irritation that he's getting himself all soggy. It might seem from this exchange that she never wants to see Senketsu cry at all, but this is shown not to be the case later in the episode, where Senketsu tears up at Ryuko's efforts be friendlier towards her sister. This time around, Ryuko offers him a blush and smile, saying, “You can get maudlin later, Senketsu.”

How I take this? Ryuko's telling him that they can cry all their tears of joy later, when the battle's done. And she's perfectly fine with that.

But then we get to the finale and Ryuko sees that she's not gonna get to cry those tears of joy with Senketsu. Her worst nightmare's come to life: she's losing him, for real this time.

Of course this is devastating. But Senketsu tells her, “Don't cry, Ryuko...”

Senketsu knows well the pain of seeing her cry, and it's not what he wants his last moments with her to be like. He tries to lighten the mood (by undermining his own importance to her), but the significant thing here is that Ryuko knows that he's dying and knows that he doesn't want her crying to be the last thing he ever experiences. After all, she gets how awful it is to make

someone you love cry—it’s why she was able to control herself so well in episode 18.

So she doesn’t go full-out sobbing on him. Her last sentence to him is a joke—a friendly bit of banter that she’ll “wear clothes that’ll make [him] jealous!” That way, it’s not bitter tears that he leaves the world with, but Ryuko being Ryuko, teasing him good-naturedly as she always has.

“Cradled in Love,” then, with its chorus proclaiming, “So don’t cry for your love, cry tears of joy,” ends up fitting the two of them really well because of the recurring motif they have regarding “bitter tears” and how neither want to see the other with them. The next line, “Cos you’re alive cradled in love” also is a wonderful match, because it’s very true to Ryuko’s situation at the end of the show. She’s lost Senketsu, but she has what she’s always wanted: a family and friends who love her. And Senketsu knows her heart; she even revealed her love of family to him before anybody else. He knows that she’s “cradled in love,” and just as he didn’t want her mourning as he died, he wouldn’t want her doing so after he’s gone, either.

In all, “Cradled in Love” probably has a lot of things to discuss in relation to Ryuko and Senketsu’s relationship, but it’s that *chorus* that makes it such a good match. With how Senketsu dies and all their discussions of crying and tears, it really does fit like a glove.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 5, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/93909451345/for-that-other-anon-you-want-a-song-that-really>

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBer_p7Zm1

“ENCHANTED”

Anonymous asked: To be honest the only reason I feel like the song "I was enchanted to meet you" fits them is probably because of Senketsu saying "I had a wonderful time, meeting you", but regardless that song reminds me of them and I can't help loving it.

Heh, I'm starting to feel like ~~any~~ song reminds me of these two...

I've never considered this song before, but ooh I like it! Let's take a look.

From what I understand, Taylor Swift's "Enchanted" follows the story of a girl who's kinda bored with life and just faking it until she meets an enticing stranger. They have a great flirty encounter, but then it's over and she's left wondering if this person knows just how "enchanted [she] was to meet [them]."

Just from that, I can definitely see some Ryuko/Senketsu vibes, though I take it more from Ryuko's POV than Senketsu's. This especially comes through with the opening few lines:

There I was again tonight
Forcing laughter, faking smiles
Same old tired lonely place

I don't think that Ryuko's particularly "forcing laughter, faking smiles" to appear happy and interested as the girl in "Enchanted" seems to be, but one thing about Ryuko's character is that she definitely puts on a tough front. She acts cocky and claims she's all about revenge, but as she reveals in episode 8, it wasn't really vengeance she was after, but rather something a lot more tender: getting to know who her father was. So, like in the song, Ryuko's not exactly showing off her real feelings at first.

Further, from a Ryuketsu perspective, the "Same old tired lonely place" line also fits really well coming from Ryuko, considering she meets Senketsu in the basement of her childhood home.

In any case, the heart of "Enchanted" (as I see it, anyway), is someone's barriers and walls all falling down when they meet someone new—a story that fits the Ryuko/Senketsu relationship to a T. I wouldn't say Ryuko and Senketsu have this immediate, "I just met you and this is crazy" sort of situation like "Enchanted" hits at, but I would argue that Ryuko opens

herself up to Senketsu before anybody else. For just a couple of examples here, in episode 2 she reaches out to talk to him in the night for want of knowing him, and in episode 7 she reveals her love of family dinners and offers him some backstory of her life before she repeats that same information to Mako in episode 8.

Another thing about “Enchanted” is that it delves a bit into the idea of fate. The singer meeting this stranger is described as something that is “destined”:

Your eyes whispered, “Have we met?”
Across the room your silhouette
Starts to make its way to me

Which all comes off as pretty perfect. These two see each other and there’s this *click*. The mention of “Have we met?” is reminiscent of the “Once Upon a Dream” sequence in Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty*, in which you get this concept of meeting someone in a dream before reality. And with all that stuff about dreams foretelling the future, “Enchanted” definitely gives off that vibe of this encounter *not* being something that happened just due to chance. It was written in the stars.

Ryuko and Senketsu? They were *literally* destined for each other. Isshin specifically made Senketsu for Ryuko, and nobody else can wear him like she can. I’ve often seen the two compared to soulmates, and it’s a pretty apt comparison. They were, quite literally, made for each other.

“Enchanted” is a lot more explicitly romantic than Ryuko and Senketsu are, but I think they do share a common theme of someone wondering if another person knows just how much they care about them. In “Enchanted,” what’s described seems to just be one encounter that unfortunately has to end before the singer can really express how much she likes this person. Similarly, Ryuko and Senketsu’s time together was cut short, and with how emotionally distant Ryuko tends to be, I can definitely see her wondering if Senketsu knows just how much he meant to her—*especially* after he dies telling her that he’s just a sailor uniform to be outgrown.

One last thing to note is how a lot of “Enchanted” focuses on the singer hoping that the person she met isn’t in love with somebody else. Which I don’t think really fits Ryuko, *but* if we are to count the episode previews narrated by Senketsu to be canon in regards to his character, Senketsu actually *does* think about love and romance a bit.

From the web preview of episode 10¹:

To be skilled at research is to be skilled at love. Research the opponent, and input all data! To be skilled at analysis is to be skilled at love. Read what the opponent's thinking and expect what'll happen next. There's a thin line between it and stalking. No, it's not true. Love and war are similar things!

And the web preview of episode 11²:

I thought about who amongst the female students at Honnouji Academy is my type. Ryuko Matoi. Satsuki Kiryuin. Mako Mankanshoku. Nonon Jakuzure. They're all very peculiar... too peculiar! Next time, a peculiar girl more peculiar than the rest will appear! Her name is Nui Harime! What is up with using her own name as an eyepatch? What? You say you don't want a mere uniform like me to talk about a favorite girl type?! Don't butt into my business, just leave me alone!

From the shortened preview of episode 12:

Getting dumped by the girl you like, that's youth!

And the web preview³:

Having a girl you like so much that you can't talk to despite your desire to, unintentionally following her to her room and waiting for her there—that is youthful indiscretion!

And finally the web preview for episode 14⁴:

A school trip is a big event in our student life where we make good memories. For some reason couples suddenly form, and break up right after the trip ends.

So, in a different Ryuko/Senketsu reading of “Enchanted,” more from his POV, I don't think it's beyond the realm of possibility for him to hope that Ryuko wouldn't fall in love with somebody else. After all, he seems to think about this sort of thing rather often, and especially keeping that episode 11 preview in mind, he's even considered Ryuko (and the other girls) and

whether or not they're his "type." With how he really grows to care for Ryuko—even going so far as to say he's "sink[ing] into depression" in the longer preview for episode 20, after she leaves him—who knows? It could fit.

But at the end of the day, I think you really hit the nail on the head about "Enchanted" and Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship, Anon. As Toshihiko Seki, Senketsu's voice actor, said in an interview⁵:

I think that a person's foremost wish is to "know one's self"
Ryuuko and Senketsu both said to each other, "I want to know you." I think it cheapens things to put this into words, but it is "love."

Through getting to know each other, both Ryuko and Senketsu also learned more about themselves, and you can bet that's pretty dang "enchanted."

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 1, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/93562654555/to-be-honest-the-only-reason-i-feel-like-the-song>

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TcCimFh1dc>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIbXZAdNGPo>
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WJ_am8nU9w
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBh6rAGggeI>
5. <http://pastebin.com/DRSthFfY>

PRINCESS TUTU (Spoilers!)

Anonymous asked: I've always loved that quote ["May those who accept their fate be granted happiness. May those who defy their fate be granted glory."] from Tutu. I remember thinking this when the OVA came out: if Senketsu really is alive in low orbit/Ryuko's heart, then Ryuko could go on living happily as they are, or she could find a way to restore his body, the key to that being she still shares the power to absorb life fibers and synchronize with starketsu. In that respect, it would be the same as the situation presented to a certain young aspiring writer at the end of Princess Tutu.

It's interesting! When I think of post-series possibilities for Ryuko and Senketsu, I find myself thinking about *Princess Tutu* a lot, too.

After all, in a way, you might compare Senketsu to Duck. One idea in *Tutu* is that Duck isn't just a duck—she's also Princess Tutu, and she's also a girl. Similarly, Senketsu isn't just a sailor uniform. He's also a human, just as Ryuko.

When Senketsu dies, he claims that all he is is the uniform, and the implication here is that such a thing as himself cannot exist anymore with the battle won and the story over. Likewise, Princess Tutu effectively disappears at the end of *Princess Tutu*, leaving Duck an “ordinary” duck. But they're both more complicated than that, aren't they?

I've never really been able to make sense of the OVA, but the open-endedness of it leads me to see many feasible possibilities for what happens with Senketsu. And I wonder: A key point to the ending of *Princess Tutu* is that the characters defy their fates and make their own happy endings. Though Fakir and Duck both should have perished had the story gone as planned, they don't. They live, and they live together. On a similar vein, *Kill la Kill* ends with the characters breaking free of the fate they had been forced into. Satsuki is freed of the karma of the Kiryuins, and—in a sense—both Ryuko and Senketsu break free of the role that Isshin/Soichiro had in store for them.

But while Ryuko and Senketsu were fated to be together, how were they fated to *end up*? I honestly have no idea. This isn't like *Princess Tutu*, where the author had a tragedy in mind and the characters decide against that. All Ryuko and Senketsu were fated to do was a job. Once that job is done,

what's left for them? Were they both supposed to die? Supposed to live?

Personally, I do headcanon that Isshin/Soichiro expected them both to die. So, in that case, it could be a lot like *Princess Tutu*—they were both designed to die, but you could argue that they both still live, defying their destinies and taking it into their own hands. Again, I really struggle with the OVA, but as Mako expresses, Senketsu and Ryuko may not be *together* together, but it seems they still are together in some sense of the word. In that way, I could see it being just as you said, Anon. Just as Fakir and Duck can go on being happy as they are in the ending of *Tutu*, Ryuko and Senketsu could go on being happy as they are... or something else could be done, something that still fits with the the idea of defying fate, something that still fits with the themes...

So, I guess that was a really long, rambling way of putting it, but I agree!

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 4, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125827513455/wow-that-was-exactly-what-i-was-looking-for-in-a>

Inspired in part by spellthief's *Princess Tutu* ending analysis here:

<http://spellthief.tumblr.com/post/27790473849/on-the-ending-of-princess-tutu>

STEVEN UNIVERSE: GEM FUSION AND LIFE FIBER SYNCHRONIZATION (Spoilers!)

whinydevil asked: I'm really fascinated with the contrast between Ryuko and Senketsu and Satsuki and Junketsu--their relationships. Seeing that explored with human/humanoid versions/interpretations would be interesting, you know? Satsuki barely reigning in and restraining a wild beast, Ryuko dancing a fierce tango with her partner as an equal. Gah.

I've always been curious how the process of Life Fiber Synchronization/Override would work if the whole clothing element from the show was reworked into something more humanoid. It's led to some pretty cute and funny fan images, but really—serious question!

Myself, I tend to imagine it as something like the fusion process from *Steven Universe*. (Maybe because Ruby and Sapphire, like, *super* remind me of Ryuko and Senketsu?¹ I mean, you got the fiery red person with the calmer, one-eyed blue person who have this relationship that is looked down upon by society, but who still want to be together no matter what? I mean their names even start with the same letters, pshh.)

As I've expressed before:

...I imagine Gem fusion isn't *too* different from Life Fiber Synchronization. Both require a connection to even work; in the case of Gem fusions, they'll fall apart if they go out of sync, and with Life Fiber Synchronization, they'll just not be as powerful as they could be. In both cases I feel like the stronger the bond, the stronger they'll be together.

Plus just the obvious. Ryuko and Senketsu are described as "becoming one," with Ryuko explicitly saying in episode 3 that "Putting on a Kamui... means becoming one with [Senketsu]. It means [Senketsu]... becoming one with me!" And then Senketsu says that they've "become one" in episode 18 as well. And with Garnet describing Gem fusions in "Alone Together" as "not two people" and "not one person," but "an experience!"... I feel like that's pretty fitting for Life Fiber Synchronization, too.

But the thing is... Gem fusion isn't always pretty, and sometimes the Gems can be essentially *forced* to stay together. Whereas Ryuko and Senketsu have a relationship and a sort of "fusion" that might be compared to Garnet, Satsuki and Junketsu would surely be something more like Malachite—they're not compatible, both sides are constantly trying to overtake the other, and it's a painful, uncomfortable experience for both parties.

In a lot of ways, using something akin to fusion in place of the clothing transformations leaves *Kill la Kill* thematically very much the same. But I think there's something really haunting in those evil alien clothes instead looking very much like *you*, and it'd probably make the differences between Senketsu and Junketsu even more apparent.

It's... fascinating, that's for sure. And I'd definitely love to see it explored more, too.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on April 21, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/143193580460/im-really-fascinated-with-the-contrast-between>

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/114085055450/whoneedsam-apand-its-stronger-than-you-no-but>

STEVEN UNIVERSE: RYUKO AND AMETHYST PARALLELS (Spoilers!)

carolgator asked: Since I'm pretty sure you're a fan of both, do you see any parallels between Amethyst and Ryuko? Because I was rewatching some Amethyst-heavy SU episodes and was reminded of Ryuko in some ways. Like how Amethyst is a "defective" Kindergarten gem (sort of like how Ryuko was a "failed" experiment) and that Amethyst was most likely isolated in the Kindergarten before the CGs picked her up (similar to Ryuko's friendless background). Idk I guess I was just surprised by the similarities I saw.

I can't say I've ever considered this before.

Though I have drawn comparisons between *Kill la Kill* and *Steven Universe* in the past (which maybe isn't all *that* out there, as the SU crew and Trigger crew are on friendly terms), it's basically always been about the parallels between Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship and Ruby and Sapphire's¹. What can I say? Both are OTPs, and they both have this narrative of, "The world thinks it's wrong if we're together, but we know in our hearts that it's *right*." I love it.

But to the topic at hand, I can see it, particularly concerning the Amethyst-heavy episode "On the Run," as mentioned. Here, the crux of the story is to address Amethyst's feelings regarding her own origins; she's upset that Pearl seems to consider her entire existence a "bad thing"—something that's "inappropriate" for Steven to know about, and something that essentially boils down to "bad Gems" making "more bad Gems." Similarly, Ryuko is kept alive by the "bad things" in her body—Life Fibers—which, much like the Gems, are aliens who want to destroy the Earth for their own benefit. The comparison becomes especially apt when Amethyst outright calls herself a "parasite," as the word is commonly used to describe Life Fibers.

As of "On the Run," none of the Crystal Gems have ever told Amethyst that she's a bad Gem or evil, and in the same way, none of Ryuko's friends or allies ever say directly to her face that she's a monster or inhuman or anything of the sort (and Senketsu gets pissed when Barazo even mentions it). But when you have them saying stuff like *this* about the whole situation...

Pearl: Steven, a very long time ago, Gems tried to do something very *bad*.

Pearl: Steven, I'm sorry. I never wanted you to see this *horrible* place [the Kindergarten].

Satsuki: If what I've done today makes me a villain, then I embrace it gladly. I'll use any means necessary to bring down a *monster* like you.

Ragyo: Really, now, you'd call your own mother a *monster*?

Satsuki: After being stabbed through the heart, you remain unfazed. What else could you be? You're a *monster* because you merged with the Life Fibers and gave up your humanity.

Barazo: You guys see that?!

Sukuyo: For a woman her age, she's super tough!

Mataro: Yeah, more like super *freaky*.

It's no wonder that Amethyst and Ryuko end up feeling really shitty about who they are. But it's not just that, either. As stated, Ryuko and Amethyst are both also immensely *lonely* characters. "Too Far"—another Amethyst-heavy episode—reveals that when Amethyst was born, all the others of her kind were already long gone. She came into the world alone, and seeing the empty holes around her likely gave the impression that something was very much *wrong* with her right away. Where had everyone else gone? Why was she the only one left? Peridot picking at this insecurity in the episode—that she's *not right*—throws Amethyst over the edge. It's probably been something that's been eating at her for centuries.

As for Ryuko, there's also the sense that she feels there's something *wrong* with her and that's why she's always been so alone, which I've written about in more detail in an analysis for episode 20's opening scene on page 271. She describes herself negatively (as a "punk" in the dub, and outright saying that she was "bad" in Japanese), she battles with feeling like she's any good for anyone, and can you really blame her, when her dad abandoned her for reasons unknown to her and she got picked on and bullied as a child? The seemingly obvious answer is that there's something *not right* with her, too.

And both Amethyst and Ryuko *do* have big moments in their respective series where they confront these issues, but for Ryuko, this is rather one-sided. I mention it in the aforementioned essay on page 271, but the cast's

efforts to calm Ryuko down after she's woken up in episode 20 fully aware of the truth of herself aren't very effective because no one's saying what she really needs to hear. No one's particularly telling her she's not like Ragyo and not a monster—they're just saying, calm down, this isn't like you, don't be irrational—and it's *not* making her feel any better. What she needed to hear was exactly along the lines of what Pearl says to Amethyst at the end of "On the Run":

Pearl: No, no, Amethyst! *You're* not the mistake. You're just the byproduct of a... big mistake. No, that's not... I... I just never thought of this as *you*. None of this is your fault! You didn't build this place! I... I'm sorry, Amethyst. I hope you can forgive me. You're the one good thing to come out of this mess. I always thought you were proud of that.

Ryuko, of course, does get over it eventually. She realizes that her "no get away from me I'm bad" mentality actually nearly *kills* the people she cares about, and finds that no matter how much she feels she doesn't deserve her friends, she can't let them down by abandoning them. She comes to terms with her insecurities, too.

But I think, still, that there is a lot of worth in exploring this aspect of Ryuko's character further, especially as it concerns other characters like in the Amethyst and Pearl situation, and *especially* concerning Satsuki. Satsuki goes around calling Ragyo a monster and thinks the worst of her, so when it turns out that *Ryuko*—a person she had been fighting for all along!—is the same, what does that mean? There's a lot of *stuff* here for a moment similar to Amethyst and Pearl's at the end of "On the Run," and Ryuko would surely always be glad to hear that no one thinks any worse of her because of something she had no control over.

So, similarities between Amethyst and Ryuko? Yeah, I can see it, and these very human doubts and fears they have really endear me to both characters.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 22, 2016

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/144793954097/since-im-pretty-sure-youre-a-fan-of-both-do-you>

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/114085055450/whoneedsamapand-its-stronger-than-you-no-but>

DESIGN CHOICES AND SYMBOLISM

CHERRY BLOSSOM SYMBOLISM IN THE OVA

If you've ever studied cinema (and oh boy have I), a big point is that in a good film, nothing is ever really "accidental." Some orange bowl on a coffee table? Yeah, that was purposely put there by someone, and yes, it likely *does* serve some sort of purpose.

Tying this back into *Kill la Kill*, the cherry blossoms in episode 25 are, of course, a lot more in-your-face than an orange bowl (probably) is—they're given *very* special focus and they're impossible to miss. You might even say that we're being hit over the head with the symbolism here.

But cherry blossoms are a symbol for a lot of things, so it does beg the question as to what exactly the intent is in this scene. Perhaps most apparently, it follows the common reading of cherry blossoms being representative of the short-but-beautiful nature of life. Considering "Till I Die" plays during the scene, I could definitely see this as a good reason why the cherry blossoms are so featured.

Yet, I think the more telling reason goes into the main theme of the OVA: graduation. In Japan, the school year ends in March, which is just when cherry blossoms tend to start blooming, and the blossoms also serve as a symbol of new beginnings¹. Obviously, this fits perfectly with episode 25. The battle's over, but the characters' lives aren't; they're moving on from the fight and starting something new. The cherry blossoms are especially featured when Mako discusses with Ryuko what they're going to do now, and there's a lot of hope and happiness at these future plans.

What's funny, though, is Aikuro's little cherry blossom tree. Mako's speeches tend to feature her mostly alone, but here both Ryuko and Aikuro are included in all the frames. This means that we get a lot of cherry blossom during Mako's speech—which is entirely about Senketsu and his bond with Ryuko. I'm gonna maintain that this was done for a reason, especially because Aikuro's tree gets a lot of its screentime during this speech.

So what is the purpose of adding even more to the cherry blossom symbolism by giving Aikuro his own little tree? Surely to be funny and quirky, but I think it also helps add to the feeling of *hope* that we get a lot of in the OVA. Mako's speech is far from mourning over the shortness of life or what was lost. No, it's saying that Senketsu will always be with Ryuko, and is much like what Ryuko goes on shouting near the end of the episode: even though they're moving on, they'll never forget what happened. It's a lot of hope for

the future, because they're building this future off of the good times of the past.

My initial thoughts definitely leaned towards a bittersweet interpretation of the cherry blossom scene. I imagined a message about recognizing the limited nature of life, but treasuring it for all the beauty and goodness it contains within it. Now that I've seen the OVA a few times over, it's clear that, while there may be elements of this, the overarching message is instead one of hope—fitting for an episode all about new beginnings, moving on, and graduation.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 6, 2014

URL:

<http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/99327438045/kuribo4indahouse-fuckyeahryuketsu>

Additional commentary: Another scene that prominently features cherry blossoms in *Kill la Kill* is when Gamagoori first battles with Satsuki, shown in flashback during episode 9. Here, there isn't quite the same message of hope, but they still seem to represent new beginnings, symbolizing Gamagoori's start with Satsuki.

The main difference between the two scenes, though, is that Gamagoori is beginning a new life *with* someone, while Ryuko is beginning a new life *without* someone.

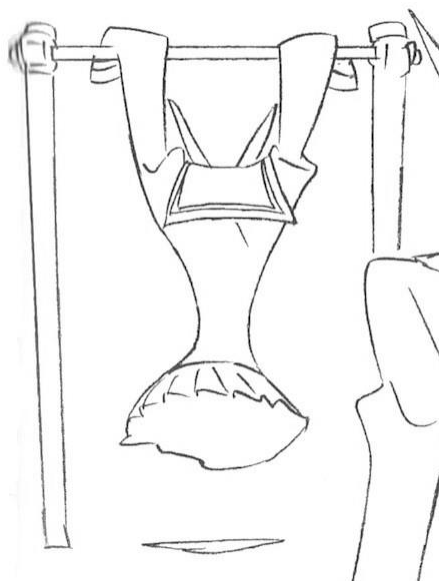
1. <http://www.japanvisitor.com/japanese-culture/seasons/cult-japan-in-spring>

FANDOM DESIGNS: BUFF HUMAN!SENKETSU

When it comes to human!Senketsu designs, I know a lot of people are put off by the fact that so many make him look all big and buff and tall. Senketsu's a dorky sweetheart—he shouldn't look so cool!

And, I mean. I enjoy seeing *all kinds* of designs for him and how he might look as a human, and think it's really neat to see how others imagine him. But can I just say that there's something really charming about someone who *is* such a cinnamon roll being huge and intimidating? It's an intense contrast, it defies expectations, and it rather fits with Senketsu's character in that he *is* seen as this horrible, monstrous thing while in reality he's immensely caring, protective, and loving. Really, the whole “big and buff” sort of design says to me that appearances aren't everything, and that's... kinda crucial to Senketsu's story. He's not just an outfit, he's not a monster, and he's really... not what you would expect by looking at him. (Or hearing him.)

Plus, Senketsu totally works out? In a concept art from the *Official Setting Materials Book 1'*, I always thought it looked like he was hanging from a pull-up bar:



And I *guess* in retrospect that he might just be hanging to dry, but. Just. *Senketsu working out.*

I love it.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on April 18, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/143050152495/when-it-comes-to-humansenketsu-designs-i-know-a>

Tags: #during that month when ryuko was in a coma i bet he worked out #he had such a hard time carrying her after all... #i mean senketsu is so protective he'd do anything to be stronger to better protect those he cares about #just like ryuko #they would be great workout buddies #really though i see the appeal and validity for like all human!senketsu designs #just sayin' that i think the whole 'big and buff' thing... actually works rather well

1. <http://imgur.com/a/CbLKd>

FINAL VOLUME COVER ART

Looking at the sketches¹ of DVD art for *Kill la Kill*, and it seems most of the drafts did end up getting finalized and used in some way. But one of the sketches that was tossed is what I'm guessing is the sketch for the final volume, which went from an epic, Senketsu-Kisaragi power-up... to Ryuko hugging Senketsu.²

And. Just. Months and months ago I gushed³ about this cover and literally wrote, “[The final volume cover] coulda been Ryuko revving up to go face Ragyo all Senketsu-Kisaragi’d out.” After all, *Kill la Kill* is a fighting anime, right? It only makes sense?

But *no*. Sushio truly, actually drafted out this really cool, badass cover *just like that*, but it was rejected in favor of having this adorable art of Ryuko hugging Senketsu instead.

That means so much to me.

Anonymous asked: I know you were impressed with the cover they went with, but I thought it only made sense. The action is just there as a garnish, like a gaudy coat covering up the real article; Ryuko and Senketsu's whole thing is the real deal. Almost every fight in the show involves Ryuko and Senketsu's bond being tested and growing. I'm much more surprised that a higher-up like Sushio thought the generic final power-up cover was the way to go at all.

Aw, I can see where Sushio was coming from with that design. It's flashy, over-the-top, and very much *Kill la Kill*, which is important when you're making a cover for the *last volume*. After all, endings are what tend to stick with people the most.

And Senketsu-Kisaragi means a lot for Ryuko and Senketsu. They are both at their strongest, both having grown so much since the beginning. Senketsu gains his missing eye. Ryuko finally understands and accepts who and what she is—and Senketsu realizes that he's the same. They are fully synchronized, sure of themselves and their goals, and this final power-up is just utterly representative of how far they've come. They went from being bad at expressing themselves and embarrassed and not understanding each other to *this*? I agree that practically all the fights in the show are about Senketsu and Ryuko becoming better partners, but having a flashy cover with

Senketsu-Kisaragi doesn't negate that—it only affirms it. Ryuko and Senketsu would have never been able to reach the point of Senketsu-Kisaragi had they not gone on this journey together.

No, the action is not what I would say to be the heart of the show, but it *is* something that definitely adds to it in a meaningful way. You can absolutely get the point of Ryuko and Senketsu's bond being crucial with the drafted design! What the final cover does is just strip it all down, taking away all the flashiness and over-the-top nature that defines so much of *Kill la Kill* to show bare what the true heart is: Ryuko and her bond with Senketsu.

And with a show that prides itself on how ridiculous and nonsensical and over-the-top it is, it just means a lot to me that the Trigger team decided that hey, all that stuff is cool and all, but what we *really* want people to get out of this thing is the point of *friendship*.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 14, 2015 and August 15, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/126766813480/i-know-you-were-impressed-with-the-cover-they-went>

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/125952840926/klk-bluraydvd-cover-sketches-by-sushio-featured>
2. http://www.kill-la-kill.jp/blu-ray_dvd/09.html
3. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/116782790235/0-memento-mori-0-reblogged-your-post-and-addedi>

FIRST TRANSFORMED SENKETSU DESIGN

Before Ryuko and Senketsu truly synchronize for the first time in episode 3, Senketsu's transformed design is different—and, as carcinocarnivals points out¹, he looks distressed. Why?

In the “Making Documentary” DVD 1—which was subtitled and included on the Volume 2 Limited Edition from Aniplex America²—there was this little bit from scriptwriter Kazuki Nakashima that seems relevant to this question:

Nakashima: It's because she's [Ryuko's] embarrassed that Senketsu gets anxious and gulps down tons of blood! You know, he's trying to communicate.

So, I'd say that the reason Senketsu looks so distressed when synchronized at first is because Ryuko's locking him out. He *wants* to work with her and help her, but she's embarrassed, she closes her heart off to everybody, and she kinda struggles with intimacy. Ryuko brings this up herself when she and Senketsu *truly* synchronize for the first time:

Ryuko: I didn't know I was doing it, but I was rejecting you [Senketsu] out of embarrassment. That's why you were drinking so much blood! And the more I pulled away, the more blood you needed to get closer! That's why it's working now, right?

The two of them can't work well together unless Ryuko opens up—“gets naked”—and until she does, Senketsu has to compensate by drinking too much of her blood in order to create a similar level of closeness. And I always argue that Senketsu really does want to get to know Ryuko and that he's trying so hard to make it work in the beginning, so his discomfort is just testament to that.

So, why does Senketsu look so upset? I'd say it's exactly this. He's uncomfortable about the fact that Ryuko's not wearing him correctly, he has to drink too much of her blood because she's not, and because he *wants* to be working well with her since he likes her and doesn't want to see her get hurt.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on March 13, 2015, as a response to carcinocarnival's post on the topic (see 1 below)

URL:

<http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/113560354515/carcinocarnivals-ok-so-theres-always-been-this>

1. <http://carcinocarnivals.tumblr.com/post/113486356135/ok-so-theres-always-been-this-one-thing-thats>
2. http://www.killlakill.com/blu-ray_dvd/06.html

JUNKETSU'S DESIGN: WHY IS IT DIFFERENT FOR SATSUKI, RAGYO, AND RYUKO?

Anonymous asked: Well hello there..When Ryuko and Ragyo put on Junketsu, Junketsu changed shape. I mean, it was different from Satsuki's. But when Satsuki put on Senketsu it was the same as Ryuuko's. Can you explain me how? (Sorry for my bad English >.<)

I... actually can't recall if this was directly ever addressed by any of the show's staff. I don't think it was, though, so I suppose I can't *really* explain what's going on in absolute, concrete canon, but I can give you my thoughts and headcanons about it!

With the Kamui, there is this point that the more covered they are, the more control they have over the wearer. So when Ryuko wears Junketsu, she's almost completely covered by it because it's controlling her, whereas when Satsuki wears it, it's the skimpy design Kamui are known for because Satsuki refuses to let Junketsu overtake her.



More on this note, I've seen it argued that when Satsuki is first shown putting Junketsu on, it's trying very hard to cover her like it covers Ryuko, so that may also be something to consider. Junketsu wants to control its wearers, so it *wants* to cover you up like it does with Ryuko. Satsuki just doesn't let it.

Senketsu, meanwhile, *doesn't* want to control his wearers. Even when he's out of his mind and desperate for blood, he's shown looking like his skimpy self the very first time Ryuko's wearing him—and I'd argue too that he

immediately wants to form a sort of friendship with her when you consider these bits from the “Making Documentary”:

Nakashima: It’s because she’s [Ryuko’s] embarrassed that Senketsu gets anxious and gulps down tons of blood! You know, he’s trying to communicate.

Regardless, though, Senketsu doesn’t cover much when people synchronize with him because it’s not his wish to control anyone. He looks the same when Ryuko and Satsuki wear him because he wants a similar bond with both of them—one built not on control, but on mutual respect, understanding, and teamwork.



Humorously, however, he’s shown upside down when Maiko puts him on¹. While he doesn’t want to control anyone (even *her*), he still doesn’t want her to use his powers to hurt people he cares about, so he doesn’t look like his “proper” synchronized self in that situation. (What a sweetie, am I right?)

As for why Junketsu looks different for Ragyo... I suppose it might have something to do with what's stated at the start of episode 21, about how only Ryuko and Ragyo (being Life Fiber-infused humans) can wear Kamui correctly? Ragyo doesn't want to get controlled by Junketsu so it still looks skimpy on her, but she's also not struggling to wear it like Satsuki would, so that may explain the difference.

I guess it may have been neat to see a slightly different synchronized form for Senketsu when Satsuki wears him to stress more this fact that his synchronization with her was makeshift and nowhere near the level it was with Ryuko, but I think it still works. Senketsu *wants* his bond with Satsuki to be that strong so he can save Ryuko, and the same, skimpy, I'm-not-gonna-overtake-you design emphasizes that.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on March 29, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/141888841980/well-hello-therewhen-ryuko-and-ragyo-put-on>

1. <http://www.kill-la-kill.jp/character/leader.html#3>

JUNKETSU-SHINZUI

Anonymous asked: Just wanted to ask your opinion on the Shinzui design for Junketsu from the "Art of Kill la Kill Bk3." I know you have some strong feelings on Senketsu' Kisaragi form, so I wondered if you have any cool insight in the Shinzui design. The main thing I saw was the emphasis on Shinzui's eyes, whereas Kisaragi is all about the mouth.



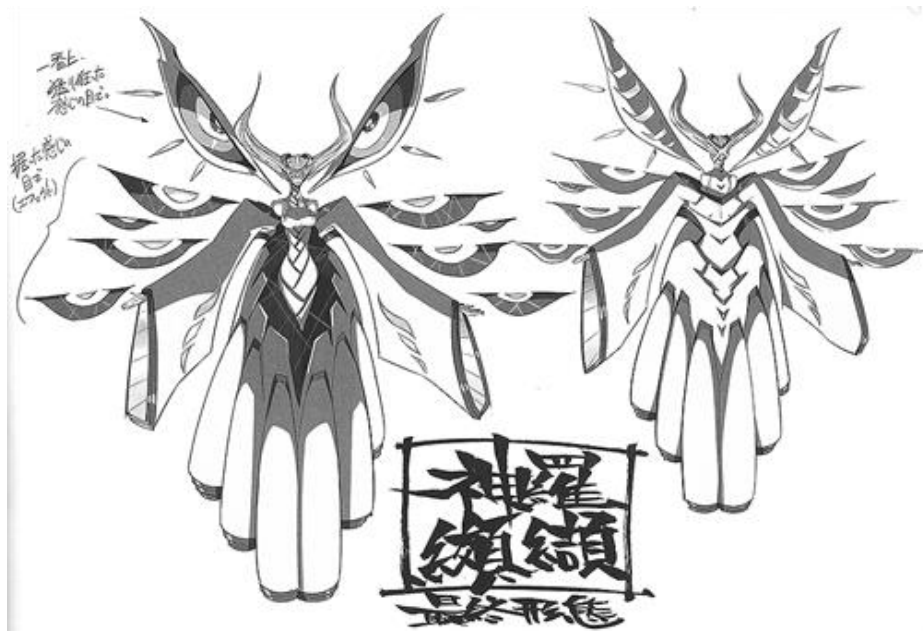
Junketsu-Shinzui as illustrated by Shigeto Koyama¹

I think that's a really good point about the focus on Junketsu-Shinzui's eyes rather than the mouth as on Senketsu-Kisaragi. There's a lot to talk about with that!

Regarding Junketsu, though it doesn't seem to be reflected in Koyama's piece here, it has been shown with numerous eyes before. At the end of *Kill la Kill*'s second opening sequence, we have these parallel shots of Ryuko and Satsuki literally tied to their Kamui (oh that Red String of Fate symbolism!), and while Senketsu is shown with only two eyes, Junketsu has a multitude:



What particularly interests me about Junketsu's design here is how reminiscent it is of Shinra-Koketsu. Shinra-Koketsu also has many eyes—it's a very defining characteristic. Like Junketsu-Shinzui, there is also what looks to be *zero* focus on the mouth. It's pretty much all about the eyes².

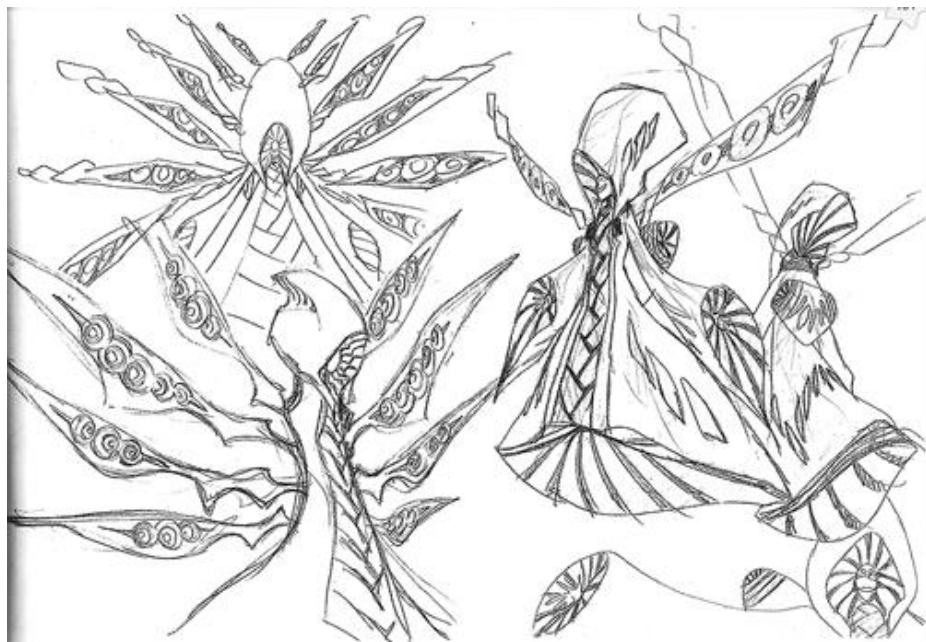


Which makes a lot of sense! Eyes are very representative of power. When you watch someone closely, you can see through all their moves, you know their secrets, and so on and so forth. When it comes to *Kill la Kill* specifically, this also seems especially relevant because of its callbacks to George Orwell's *1984*, in which one of the most iconic lines is the haunting, "Big Brother is watching you." No matter what you do, you can't escape that all-encompassing power.

Similarly, Shinra-Koketsu's greatest weapon is exactly that: Absolute Submission. Ragyo literally describes this in the finale by saying, "Those that rebel against it tremble in fear and are rendered powerless." These ideas of eyes and power are very clearly, deliberately connected.

Tying this back to Junketsu, it's crucial to note that it was originally supposed to be able to activate Absolute Submission itself, but Satsuki weakened it with chemicals to strip it of this ability³. Shinra-Koketsu is, in all actuality, simply a replacement for Junketsu, and the deeper meaning here is that *this* is what a Kamui should be capable of. Junketsu in the second opening is what Junketsu *should* have been, had Satsuki not altered fate.

Of course, Koyama's design for Junketsu-Shinzui doesn't seem to have the many eyes, but they are still highly emphasized. We also don't seem to see the teeth as in Senketsu-Kisaragi³ at all, same as how we don't see this in Shinra-Koketsu. It is this point that interests me the most about the design.



After all, Senketsu-Kisaragi having so much focus on the teeth makes a lot of sense (and makes me emotional). While speaking with our mouths isn't the only way we communicate with each other, the mouth is still a good symbol for the idea. Senketsu-Kisaragi emphasizes the mouth and the teeth because Senketsu-Kisaragi emphasizes Ryuko and Senketsu's growth together—a growth that happens because of their communication, cooperation, and teamwork. He's *not* a creepy, horrifying power machine in Senketsu-Kisaragi, but Ryuko's friend. I've seen the teeth compared to wings, and I find that especially sweet. Their friendship allows them to soar.

When I think more on it, it makes me rather glad that Junketsu-Shinzui was never used in the series. Don't get me wrong—it's a cool design, and Koyama illustrated it beautifully. But narratively, I don't think it would be satisfying. Junketsu and Junketsu-Shinzui represent domination and control. While there's a wonderful plot concerning Satsuki refusing this control by instead controlling *it*, this is still a “relationship” built completely on these two sides fighting to overpower one another. And when Satsuki has a huge moment of character growth where she realizes the importance of teamwork and cooperation after coming to terms with how she was *wrong* to manipulate people and use them as her tools—not to mention a final battle *all about* how love and friendship are stronger than *any* other power—it makes Junketsu-Shinzui very ill-fitting.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on December 20, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/135560035010/just-wanted-to-ask-your-opinion-on-the-shinzui>

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/127243588995/satsuki-in-junketsus-final-form-junketsu-shinzui>
2. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/127410188798/ragyoshinra-koketsu-designs-by-sushio-imaishi>
3. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/127357781165/sheet-ryuko-and-senketsu-transformation>

KILL LA KILL AND THE RED STRING OF FATE

Perhaps one of the most prominent pieces of imagery in *Kill la Kill* are the Life Fibers. They are literally red threads, immediately drawing up a connection to a very famous concept: the Red String (or Thread) of Fate¹.

Mako explicitly makes this connection in episode 11:

Mako: It's the red thread of fate! The invisible thread that connects the pinkies of people destined for each other!

This sums up the basic idea. A matchmaker god ties destined lovers together by a red thread, forever joining their fates. Though this typically tends towards romantic connotations, *Kill la Kill* instead creates a broader message that boils down to something far more basic: the ideas of fate and destiny. Senketsu's episode previews make this point very overt, with many of them including direct references to these ideas; one particularly fascinating example is the following segment from the long preview for the very first episode²:

Senketsu: Satsuki Kiryuin, the student council president of steel... Ryuko Matoi, a transfer student who seeks the one who killed her father... And Kamui Senketsu, the living school uniform... Each one of their threads of destiny will be dyed blood red.

Since this is episode 1, Senketsu is setting the stage here, and he outlines who are arguably the three most major characters: Ryuko, Satsuki, and himself. It is the paths of each of these characters crossing that ultimately creates the plot, as it is their destinies becoming entwined that make *Kill la Kill*, well, *Kill la Kill*. Of course, this is pretty standard stuff, but *Kill la Kill*'s narrative focus on the concepts of *fate* and *destiny* takes it a little further, especially in regards to these three characters.

Ryuko

I'll start with our protagonist. Ryuko comes into the story confused, and not quite sure where she's going. She wants answers, and she's spent the months after her father's death trying to get them. Unbeknownst to her, however, her father's got a big plan in store for her, and has been planning it her entire life. His goal? Ryuko uses Senketsu, the weapon he designed just

for her, to stop Ragyo's horrific goal of wiping out humanity for the Life Fibers. When Senketsu first appears before Ryuko, it is her Call to Destiny. Being with him is the path her father decided for her. The question is: Does she take it?

Notably, this Call to Destiny isn't something that's just subtext. It's one of the show's bigger narrative elements that Ryuko and Senketsu are fated for each other, and it comes up directly in the text. The dialogue makes it exceedingly clear.

From episode 13:

Senketsu: I want to be worn by you [Ryuko]. I was likely born for the express purpose of being worn by you.

From episode 16:

Aikuro: And the only one who can wear that Kamui to its full potential is you, Ryuko!

Aikuro: So he made Senketsu for you. To thwart the Kiryuins' ambitions.

Visually, it may also be argued that Ryuko's father, Isshin Matoi, resembles the matchmaker god of the original tale³. And on that line, while it could be said that the Life Fiber-composed Senketsu *is* a red thread of fate himself—especially considering that it is Senketsu who really allows Ryuko's fate to be tied with Satsuki's—this is complicated by the fact that Senketsu is very much a character as well. Still, no matter how you view it, it proves a fascinating link, as Isshin/Soichiro *does* create his own destiny for Ryuko just as the matchmaker god does for lovers.

Regardless of the intentions behind Isshin's design, however, *Senketsu is made for Ryuko*, whether she likes it or not. I ask if she takes this, but the answer is in reality much more complicated than a simple "yes/no."

In one sense, Ryuko *does* take it. She is happy to work with Senketsu at first... except, it's not because she plans to stop Ragyo and save the whole world like her father wants. She goes with it because Senketsu has power, and she sees that power as her key to the answers she's looking for. Yet, simultaneously, she also *doesn't* take it. When Ryuko learns the truth of what her father wanted, she pulls Senketsu from her body in a fit of rage,

screaming about the cruelty of forcing him into this destiny without ever asking his opinion. Here, she *won't* do as her father wishes, because she finds it horribly unjust to someone she's come to consider one of her best friends.

Of course, Ryuko is the hero of this story, so it's expected that she's gonna end up saving the world anyway. And this she does, but it's made pretty clear that she's not especially doing so because her father wanted her to. She decides to fight for the sake of her loved ones, and she does it *her* way. This is why she abandons Senketsu upon learning her true nature late in the series; at this point, she *is* willing to fight Ragyo and save the world, but she's not gonna get anyone else involved in it. Fate may have chosen a path for her, but she always decides how she's taking it.

This is essentially how I would sum up Ryuko's main relation to fate and destiny. There's a reason one of her most famous lines is, "To hell with your opinion! I'll take my own path, no matter what anyone else says!" and a reason we have a very powerful, memorable scene of her ripping a mind-control red thread straight from her brain: she does what *she* wants, whether it aligns with what you want her to do or not.

Where it gets a little twisted is where *Ragyo's* ideas of Ryuko's fate come in, which leads me to...

Satsuki

Senketsu says in the long preview⁴ for episode 17 that "Expectations of [Ryuko's father, Isshin Matoi, and Satsuki's mother, Ragyo Kiryuin] will determine the fate of the two daughters," and it is in this statement that we see the two major conflicting points of the series. Soichiro/Isshin had his own ideas about the fate of his two daughters; as he planned it, both would work to stop Ragyo. Ragyo, on the other hand, thinks of humanity as nothing but food for the Life Fibers, and aimed to use her own children to accomplish the Fibers' goal of destroying the planet. Ryuko and Satsuki, then, are faced with two different pre-determined "fates" by their parents: either stop Ragyo, or join her.

Though Satsuki goes along more with her father's ideas than Ragyo's, the conflict of much of the series exists because Ryuko *believes* that Satsuki is against her. Up until the great reveal at the end of episode 17, Satsuki looks to be following her mother's goal—even to Ragyo herself. So, initially? We have this big clash of a girl unwittingly falling into her father's plans and another girl knowingly following this same man's plans while looking like

she's actually abiding by what her mother wants. Whew!

Much like Ryuko, though, it's interesting to consider why Satsuki does what she does. As a young girl, her father is upfront with her about what he wants her to do; recounting this in episode 18, Satsuki reveals that he exposed to her the true horrors of Ragyo and trusted her to rebel against her mother's grim objective, knowing that he himself would be wiped out and could not do it alone. Satsuki's lifelong goal then becomes exactly what Soichiro/Isshin wants: She'll stop Ragyo, using whatever means necessary. But this begs the question. Does she do this simply and wholly because her father told her to, and she wants to make him proud?

To which I say a firm *no*. Also like Ryuko, Satsuki is motivated by her loved ones. Ragyo is the reason her father and little sister are taken away from her, which Satsuki does *not* take lightly. Significantly, it's important to note that the Drama CDs⁵ and the Elite Four Light Novel⁶ make clear that Satsuki absolutely *adored* her father and was so utterly devastated at his "death" that she underwent a great change. No longer was she the happy, optimistic little girl that Nonon found so unappealing and dull after that. In this way, Satsuki has her own very personal reasons to fight this fight, which she says herself when she tells Ragyo everything in episode 18:

Satsuki: Ragyo Kiryuin! You'll pay for taking the life of my father, Soichiro Kiryuin! And for the life of my baby sister!

On another level, Satsuki also seems to be motivated by guilt. Like it or not, Ragyo is her family, and she feels as though she must make amends for the horrors Ragyo wrought because of this. Upon Ragyo's destruction in the finale, she notes that she's finally "free of the Kiryuin's karma."

In the end, what we're left with is another character who *knows* what someone else wants her to do, but she goes through with it for her own reasons—and in her own way. Junketsu proves an especially compelling example of this. Soichiro, acting much like the matchmaker god of the Red String of Fate story, informs little Satsuki that Junketsu will one day be her wedding dress. Notably, *Kill la Kill* doesn't stray away from the negative implications of destiny, as he also tells her, "But when you put it on, you'll become a slave to clothing." In other words? Satsuki agrees to wear Junketsu, and she agrees to her cruel fate.

The dialogue when Satsuki first puts on Junketsu particularly touches on this:

Satsuki: This red blood is the eternal vow between you and I. The red thread of our covenant!

With this action, there is no going back. Junketsu is awakened, and forever connected to her. Satsuki is electing to do as her fate decides.

But she does do this in her own way. She doesn't just take Junketsu as it is. She poisons it with chemicals⁷, weakening it, and later changes its composition even more with Senketsu's Fibers and her and Ryuko's blood, making it more manageable for her to wear. She takes the fate Soichiro/Isshin wanted of her, true, but she does it *her* way, and for her own reasons, just as Ryuko does.

Senketsu

To further complicate all this, we're also presented with the idea that Ryuko, Senketsu, and Satsuki choosing to follow the fate that Soichiro/Isshin had in mind for them is a path of struggling and pain. To follow Ragyo's fate instead is easier, a point that is illustrated in heartbreaking clarity when Satsuki loses Junketsu and Ryuko is forced into it. Here, wearing Junketsu as Ragyo desires, Ryuko is thrown into a fantasy dream world where she believes she has everything she's ever wanted. Of course, she also completely loses herself and becomes nothing more than a puppet to Ragyo's fate (page 21)—with her “happiness” nothing but a fabrication—but the fact remains that *this* is the easy way. Fighting against this fate as her father planned for her is hard. It hurts. She struggles. To stop resisting and accept it all... it means you don't have to fight anymore.

But when Ryuko is presented with the choice of staying in a false world or coming back to the harsh reality, she chooses to go back. In a gut-wrenching scene, Ryuko tears Junketsu from her body, risking death... and all so she can be with Senketsu again.

In the following episode, Ryuko's claim that Senketsu and Mako are “more than friends” to her again hits at the fact that though Ryuko is *also* fated to be with Senketsu by her father, that's not why she nearly kills herself trying to be with him. Fate may have brought them together, but in the end, it's far from the reason they stay that way.

But what about Senketsu himself? He's torn between the fate of his species—which says to consume humans—and also the fate of what Soichiro/Isshin wants for him. Like Ryuko and Satsuki, he chooses to go the way of Soichiro/Isshin's wishes, no matter the difficulties that come with this.

Also like Ryuko and Satsuki, it's clear early on that Senketsu takes this path for the sake of someone close to him. He's full of warnings for Ryuko's protection, unsynchronizes with her to save her from passing out from blood loss, risks his life for her, and so on. Yet, he's also different from those two in that he starts the series as a blank slate, and does a lot of what he does simply because someone *tells* him to. Unlike Ryuko and Satsuki, he doesn't always exactly do things his way from the get-go.

For instance. When Ryuko tells him that he's coming with her as soon as they meet, he goes along with it without question. When he tries to stop Ryuko from wearing him to protect her from Tsumugu, he gives in and lets her wear him anyway. When Ryuko rejects him for fear of herself after she had gone berserk upon meeting Nui Harime, he explains that he wants to be worn by her because he thinks *that* is his life's purpose and why he was born. It turns out he's right, of course—his destiny is to be worn by Ryuko—but all this begs the question of what Senketsu *himself* really wants. Is he just doing these things simply and wholly because it's his job to be there for Ryuko, and what he was designed for?

To which I say another firm *no*. Soichiro/Isshin clearly did not brainwash Senketsu into following along with this fate without question, as he's shown early on struggling with the monstrous side of Life Fibers, and he's initially attracted to Ryuko purely for what she can give him: blood. And while you may argue at first that he's only protecting Ryuko because he feels he must and harbors no genuine feelings for her, this argument cannot hold water later on. Senketsu may have been designed for a purpose, but that purpose isn't what makes him burst into tears over Ryuko, and it isn't what drives him to see her happy.

Senketsu does take a more driving role later on as he learns and grows. He stops passively letting Ryuko do things that he thinks are no good for her, and his opinions become more valued by Ryuko herself. In the end, though, we're left with the same thing. Here's yet another character whose life is so incredibly dictated by fate, and while he goes along with it, he does it for his own reasons, and in his own way.

Everyone is Connected

I'm really only scratching the surface on *Kill la Kill*'s use of fate. These red threads are *everywhere*, and the dialogue, character songs, and opening/ending animation filled with references.

But everything I've discussed seems to be a central idea. Our three major characters recognize their fates, choose to follow through with it in order to break free from it, but always do so in their own way. They don't blindly give in to it—they create their own paths.

What's especially interesting about *Kill la Kill* is that it emphasizes both the bad and good of being tied to fate. The whole show can be described as being about breaking free from it, but at the same time... this fate also brings the characters together. Destiny leads Ryuko to Senketsu and Mako, leads Satsuki to Shiro and her Elite Four, leads Aikuro to Tsumugu—all found families and soulmates—and then connects all of *them* together, too.

In the end, Ryuko, Senketsu, and Satsuki are able to toss away the cruel fate they had been unjustly forced into, but they keep the valuable bonds they made along the way because of it. And, well, *that's* a huge message of the show, and the message it leaves you with in its final moments.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on November 22, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/133723446250/perhaps-one-of-the-most-prominent-pieces-of>

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_string_of_fate
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8qH5pIzeHU>
3. <http://art-eater.com/2013/11/kill-la-kill-the-fashion-of-fascism/>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7FFplWcJ3k>
5. <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/post/113233895080/h0saki-satsuki-talking-to-soroi-about-her-past>
6. https://www.reddit.com/r/KillLaKill/comments/1xsznb/elite_4_ln_uz_u_sanageyama/
7. <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/post/94562761470/h0saki-i-think-rei-has-more-lines-in-this-drama>

Anonymous asked: In the second opening, see Ryuko and Satsuki tied up and restrain by the (possibly) life fibers. They also look quite pained. Does this imply they do not like what is happened? Is it possible they are hurt from life fiber? Please go in more detail on this, I would like to hear from you :) Sorry my english not good, by the way. It's not my first language! Thank you



I definitely think it's a huge plot point that Life Fibers hurt Satsuki. Wearing Junketsu brings her *incredible* amounts of pain, and though she tries so hard to hide it, it's clear that it's an absolutely awful experience for her. Notably, this only furthers what Satsuki thinks she already knows: Life Fibers are completely evil, and anything that contains them the same.

Satsuki is taught to think this from childhood, and you can't really blame her. Life Fibers killed her father, killed her sister, and are the reason her mother is horrible. When she first decides to wear Junketsu, she *knows* it's not going to be good—Soichiro tells her point blank that she'll be a "slave" to it. But she does it anyway because she's put it upon herself to rid the world of this evil. So she struggles and endures immense amounts of pain because she so desperately wants to fight for what's right.

But... Satsuki's ideas of "right" get challenged when she learns that, actually, the sister she'd thought dead is right before her, *kept alive* by the very creatures she's deemed evil. The terrible things she'd said about her mother now apply to a person she was fighting for all along. If Ragyo is a monster for her ability to be perfectly fine after being stabbed through the heart, does it make Ryuko a monster, too? Ryuko, passionate and loving, who cares so

much for her father and her friends that she challenges *Satsuki Kiryuin* of all people?

Satsuki's suddenly faced with the thought that *not only* has she been using this person she was fighting for as a mere tool, but also that her beliefs on Life Fibers... may not be as set in stone as she once was so sure of. Maybe the “fairytale” she once deemed Ryuko and Senketsu's friendship is not so much a “fairytale” after all. Maybe Life Fibers aren't always all bad.



So, bringing this all back around to the second opening, I consider these shots of Ryuko and Satsuki literally tied to their Kamui to be something that adds to the Red String of Fate symbolism seen throughout the show, and see it as commentary about the nature of destiny. Junketsu is Satsuki's “wedding

dress” and the thing she’s destined for, just as Senketsu was literally made for Ryuko. From Satsuki’s perspective, this fate is cruel. There is nothing kind about what she has been fated to do. Junketsu is a horrible monster, same as the mother she’s had to deal with, and she will do what she must to break free.

But what about Ryuko? Her fate is surely cruel as well, stated directly in the song “Till I Die.” Her father designed her as a weapon, and things don’t always go the greatest with Senketsu. Transforming at first is an embarrassment. They both struggle with opening up to each other. They bicker and argue ~~like an old married couple~~. But just as Life Fibers may not always be so bad, there seems to be a point here that neither is destiny. Sure, it’s not always easy with Senketsu, but Ryuko quickly comes to *love* being his partner, and synchronizing becomes something that feels *good*. When they’re perfectly in-sync in episode 18, she gushes about how great it is, and in episode 22, she proclaims that he’s so comfortable that she never wants to take him off again. Her fate may be cruel, but her fate also brought her to this person whom she loves more than words can express.

I do think that Ryuko and Senketsu’s relationship ends up causing a great change in Satsuki. When she learns that Ryuko is infused with Life Fibers, she must realize that Life Fibers do not inherently make someone evil or a monster, making it so that Ryuko’s friendship with Senketsu is perhaps *not* the impossibility she once thought. She considers his feelings when she sees him next as they work together, and though Senketsu *does* strain her body in a way he doesn’t with Ryuko, their hearts are able to be as one because they both want to save Ryuko. From here, there’s the point that fate isn’t all bad—just as Ryuko has these “batshit crazy” people protecting her, Satsuki does as well, and she would have never met them had it not been for fate.

So, do the Life Fibers hurt Ryuko and Satsuki? Yes, just as fate does. But perhaps they also do a lot of good, too.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on January 26, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/138129651155/in-the-second-opening-see-ryuko-and-satsuki-tied>

RYUKO AND SCARVES

So, here's something: Ryuko and scarves.

To start with, Ryuko in the tracksuit with Scarfketsu—from what I can tell—is one of the more popular outfits from *Kill la Kill*. Which makes sense—it's a good look! I've always really loved Sushio's turns of the design, such as this one included in his artbook *SUSHIO CLUB LOVE LOVE KLLK1*:



Adorable, am I right? But it's also a pretty cute picture to think about when you consider the fact that Ryuko fashioned Senketsu into that scarf all on her own—something she really didn't have to do. Everyone else who wears pieces of Senketsu after he'd been torn up simply place the scrap on their uniform, which isn't exactly the best fashion statement.

Presumably, Ryuko could have done the same to Senketsu's eye, but she doesn't. She takes all she has left of him and makes something cute. And while the show doesn't go into it *too* much, I think that point of "cuteness" is interesting when taken in relation to Senketsu's character, since he seems to be rather concerned about being a cute outfit. You can get this in a few places, such as in episode 3 when he checks out Ryuko's pajamas in an act that may stem from jealousy, episode 21 where he's hurt and offended when Junketsu!Ryuko calls him ridiculous/ugly and he begs Ryuko if she "really means that," and, of course, his death scene, where he tells Ryuko to wear clothes that are cuter than him.

So Sushio's concept arts have always been favorites of mine because of all the extra emphasis placed on Scarfketsu. It's as though Ryuko's assuring him that she'll get him all back, but in the meantime, he's still cute.

Or, you know, it's just concept art and I'm going too far into fanfiction land.

Still, there's a connection created here between Senketsu and scarves. I'm sure I'm not the only one who's felt that the reason Ryuko wears the red scarf in the epilogue of episode 24 is in Senketsu's memory. And (sort of) recently, *Kill la Kill* animator Kengo Saito drew some Mikiryu fanart of Ryuko working part-time in a clothing store, which feature Ryuko wearing a red scarf... that he went out of his way to color in red.²

I guess you could say that's what inspired this whole thing. I saw this and I wondered, "Why *do* I connect Senketsu and scarves so much?" Obviously there's Scarfketsu, but Ryuko's only wearing him like that briefly for a couple of episodes, so why does it make such an impact? I say it's because of what I just brought up. Scarfketsu represents Ryuko doing something for Senketsu in more ways than one. Not only is the tracksuit, Scarfketsu!Ryuko different and fiercely determined to save her friend, but she also fashioned that scarf all of her own accord for him. Maybe it's a small gesture, but hey, who knows? It could mean the world to Senketsu.

In the end, though, the scarf isn't just cute. It's also a symbol of Ryuko and Senketsu's friendship, which is exactly why Ryuko wearing a red scarf takes the mind immediately to "Ryuko honoring Senketsu."

~~...or, you know, I'm just reading way too much into it.~~

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 21, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/122106471175/so-heres-something-ryuko-and-scarves>

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/127265660845/ryuko-drawings-by-kill-la-kill-character-designer>
2. <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/post/120120297740/mikiryuko-kengo-saito-klk-animator-put-up-a>

RYUKO'S MOTORCYCLES

Anonymous asked: Do you think there's any symbolism involved with the various motorcycles Ryuko uses in the show or are they just some random motorcycles.

E^{h...} On the one hand, designs are a big part of animation, and visual storytelling in general. If I've learned anything from my countless hours devoted to film study, it's that virtually every element on screen is purposely and consciously designed in a specific way, going for a certain effect. (Well, in *most* things, anyway.)

And I do think a lot of care and thought went into *Kill la Kill*'s designs. This means that each of the bikes Ryuko uses throughout the series were absolutely designed with meanings in mind. On the other hand, though, I wouldn't really say there's a lot of heavy symbolism involved with these particular designs myself.

Here's my breakdown:



This is Ryuko's first bike (unless you count the delivery scooter she stole in the first episode). It's a gift from Mako's father to her, so ignoring the design of it completely, just the object itself symbolizes Ryuko's acceptance into the family. Design-wise, it's cute and nonthreatening, adding more to this family concept. This is a personal bike for leisure, not battle. Ryuko never charges into a fight with this bike.



Here's Ryuko's second bike. It is big, bold, and red. It's heroic and for kicking asses, which the design brings across. Ryuko gets some of her most killer moments riding this bike, which wouldn't exactly have the same effect had she been riding the cute scooter she got from the Mankanshokus.



And Ryuko's final bike is just ridiculous. It is so completely over-the-top and nonsensical that it comes off to me as being silly. Perhaps the point here is that Ryuko's being nonsensical herself in rejecting Senketsu and running away from all her friends?

So, symbolism in the bikes? Maybe to the extent that *all* carefully-designed things for the screen are a little symbolic—which is definitely fun to talk about!—but I don't think it especially stands out.

Notes and Links

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URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/126467136135/do-you-think-theres-any-symbolism-involved-with>

Additional Commentary: It's come to my attention that Ryuko's second bike may be a reference to Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*. In *SUSHIO CLUB LOVE LOVE KLKL*, there's an image based off an *Akira* film poster featuring this bike.

SENKETSU AND JAPANESE ONI

I've been doing a little bit of reading lately on Japanese *oni* (which may be loosely translated as “demons”), since I was planning on writing this one *Kill la Kill* Alternate Universe story and was wondering how to incorporate Senketsu's character. ~~(Of course, one fic idea quickly became two and oh lord will either actually be finished.)~~ Particularly, I've been leafing through Noriko T. Reider's *Japanese Demon Lore: Oni from Ancient Times to the Present*.¹

And this stuff is just... super interesting when taken in consideration with Senketsu's character. Though *oni* are, of course, *incredibly* varied from what I've gathered and there is a *lot* of history surrounding them that I can hardly begin to grasp, Reider writes of common characteristics you might see in *oni*, some of which fit Senketsu well; like many *oni*, Senketsu's species are known and feared for devouring human flesh, for example, or, on a lesser level, Ryuko gains horns on her head when she transforms with him, with horns being a very common *oni* feature (which also seem to be seen in some of Senketsu's early, more humanoid designs²). But mostly, I was really drawn to what draws me to Senketsu's (and related) stories so much: like many *oni*, he is the “other.” As Reider puts it, he is, as *oni*, “The Oppressed, Alienated, and Isolated” (Reider 35).

This can have some pretty haunting implications. Reider notes that the story of the terrible *oni* leader Shuten Doji who devoured maidens and drank their blood with his band of *oni* followers... may have been in reality a gang of foreign bandits who drank red wine. Similarly, a belief once was that babies born with teeth were *onigo* (*oni*'s child), and were often killed, or, more kindly, sent to become monks because of it. Of course, as Reider explains, “As many social scientists cross-culturally have come to observe however, it is human nature to apply social stigma to those displaying any difference or anomaly” (Reider 40). There is nothing particularly unique about demonizing those who don't fit.

And, well... that's just the thing that brought me here in the first place. I've voiced my disappointment that Senketsu is hardly included in Alternate Universe fanworks before, but I really think a part of that is because it's seen as difficult to incorporate a character as silly-sounding as a talking shirt into another universe. It doesn't fit with the tone, it's too ridiculous... so he's left out. But just as modern *oni* stories tend towards a sympathetic message

regarding the *oni*, Senketsu's story is remarkably similar.

Consider Go Nagai's *Devilman*. Despite its obvious elements of Christianity, it's included in Reider's book as an example of an *oni* story. And what is this story? Akira Fudo, to save the planet from demons, fuses with the powerful demon Amon, allowing him to transform into the titular Devilman. In regards to Senketsu, it's crucial to note that *Kill la Kill* draws a *ton* of influence from Go Nagai (perhaps most obviously with *Cutey Honey*), and Senketsu has allegedly been confirmed³ to have some slight *Devilman* inspiration: the color scheme of berserk Ryuko⁴ is said to have been based on Devilman. I think this comes through even clearer on one official T-shirt made for the show, which plays up Senketsu's monstrous nature—featuring him demanding blood—and includes the Devilman colors once more. In any case, however, just as Akira, Senketsu is a different species and “other” who is trying to save humanity. It doesn't matter if he's Devilman or a talking shirt—the underlying ideas here are still much the same.

In the end, I don't know how much Senketsu was inspired by *oni*, or if he even was at all. But my point is, the heart of his story is that he's different, “other,” and marginalized. He doesn't have to be a talking shirt for this to hold true. In alternate stories, make him a demon. A robot. A half-giant. A werewolf. Yes, even a vampire. Heck, he could be that weird foreign kid who doesn't speak Japanese too well and only Ryuko can understand him.

It's not a discredit to Senketsu's character to change his form into something that fits in an altered *Kill la Kill* universe.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 22, 2015

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/131725348702/ive-been-doing-a-little-bit-of-reading-lately-on>

Additional Commentary: I've also heard it mentioned that some of Senketsu's early transformed designs resemble traditional *oni*. Additionally, Sushio stated at Trigger's 2014 Anime Expo panel that early Kamui designs looked like Devilman⁵.

1. http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/59/
2. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/125617928163/guts-dtr-covers-and-senketsu-designs-from-the>
3. <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/225692543/References.html>
4. <http://imgur.com/XDpmrph>
5. <http://forum.evageeks.org/thread/14370/Anime-Kill-la-Kill/1660/>

SENKETSU'S EYEPATCH: WHY DID ISSHIN DESIGN SENKETSU WITH ONE?

It's been stated that the out-of-universe reason for Senketsu's eyepatch is twofold: that it is a reference to *Diebuster*, and that it adds to the point of Senketsu being "still imperfect, with room for improvement and evolution"¹ (hence why he gains this eye in the finale). Thematically, this emphasizes the idea that Ryuko and Senketsu are the *same* and equals—a concept expressed time and time again, from Mako outright saying that neither one holds any authority over the other in episode 24, to Ryuko herself proclaiming that she and Senketsu are "two in one" in episode 15, to Aikuro describing them as "true partners" in episode 6—and that they are both learning and growing together. Not only are they kindred spirits in that they are both and neither "human and clothing," but they are also kindred spirits in that they are able to take this journey of self-growth and evolution simultaneously.

But what could possibly be the in-universe reason for Isshin to design Senketsu in this way? When you think about it, designing a *weapon* with only one eye seems... an odd choice, to say the least. Did Isshin simply feel he had no time to complete Senketsu fully? Or was it to create a connection between Senketsu and himself, as both Isshin and Senketsu wear eyepatches over the same eye? And if such is the case, would the reasoning behind it be that Ryuko would then feel more comfortable trusting and working with Senketsu as her partner, as he subtly resembles her father and is therefore familiar to her? Was this design choice simply a ploy to help push Ryuko and Senketsu together?

It's a difficult question. With what little material that is available concerning Isshin/Soichiro, I think it's really impossible for us to speak concretely about his intentions. However, in canon, Ryuko does describe her relationship with her father as strained, citing the fact they "never got along" to be the reason that he sent her away. The song "I want to know" from the OST also seems to be from Isshin/Soichiro's perspective, and the lyrics full of regret over how he treated Ryuko; he notes that she is alone, that he never got to tell her anything, and what he "wants to know" is whether or not she loves him. With such a difficult relationship, then, it seems unlikely that Isshin/Soichiro would purposely choose to design Senketsu after himself for the purpose of upping Ryuko's inclination to trust, and this also begs the question of how much Senketsu really resembles Isshin at all. The similarity

boils down to simply the eyepatch, and is such a thing truly enough to create *that* much of a resemblance, especially in a series where eyepatches are rather commonplace? (See “Is Senketsu Isshin?” on page 192 for further analysis on this point.)



In this image from “Mako’s Story” in SUSHIO CLUB LOVE LOVE KLKL, even the bunny on the cat’s eyepatch has an eyepatch²

Still, Isshin/Soichiro *did* need Ryuko and Senketsu to be able to work as a team in order for his plan to work, and though the eyepatch may not help accomplish this, perhaps other elements might. I think episode 17 provides some interesting insights about this. After Ryuko and Senketsu’s heart-to-heart under the stars, Aikuro tells the story of Kinue, Tsumugu’s sister, who died testing what we can presume was a prototype of Senketsu. Aikuro says Isshin/Soichiro “figured it out” after that—as in, he found that the only way to make Life Fibers cooperate with you was to splice the fibers with human DNA. This means that Senketsu was deliberately created as a Life Fiber/human hybrid just like Ryuko was, adding to their status as equals. Perhaps this equality they share—right down to their genetic material—is what would lead Isshin/Soichiro to believe that they’d get along and trust one another.

As for the question at hand? Well, maybe the guy just thought eyepatches were cool. He *did* incorporate one as part of his own disguise, after all.

Notes and Links

A synthesis of my posts and thoughts concerning Senketsu's eyepatch, especially inspired by a post from argentdandelion (see 3 below), and the original response I wrote for it on June 4, 2015.

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/120679732300/why-does-senketsu-have-an-eyepatch>

1. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/90923453499/from-the-anime-expo-kill-la-kill-panel-with-sushio>
2. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/127238878290/pages-21-30-of-sushios-mako-monogatari-makos>
3. <http://argentdandelion.tumblr.com/post/120662792636/why-does-senketsu-have-an-eyepatch>

chromaticdragonking asked: It occurs to me after reading your post about why Senketsu has one eye; it could also be to counterpoint Junketsu's "purity," as a representation of wounds and scars.

That's an interesting point!

While it seems the “official” reasoning behind the eyepatch is to bring across the message that Senketsu is “incomplete” (as expressed directly¹ and reflected in “Before my body is dry” too with Senketsu’s line, “I wanna be complete”), you’re right—an eyepatch is often very much an indication of being hurt. It means you’ve lost your eye, likely due to some traumatic event (as with Nui), or, perhaps, that you have an eye infection.



It’s rather... cruel, when you think about it. Isshin/Soichiro deliberately made Senketsu come into the world like that. Despite being literally a baby (who are kinda the epitome of “purity”) and having absolutely no life experience, he goes around *looking* scarred and wounded like he’s had a long, harrowing life.

But much like Toshihiko Seki’s deep adult voice for Senketsu, it also works to provide a huge contrast. Senketsu may like to *sound* wise and like he’s so mature and knows everything—and his voice as provided by Seki

definitely gives off this impression—but he doesn’t really know anything at all, he’s confused, and self-admittedly immature. Likewise, he almost *looks* wise and experienced with an eyepatch, but once more, he’s really... not.

I’ve said it before, but it’s always one of the saddest things to me, when Senketsu is interpreted as a father figure or a mentor for Ryuko and thus his death is “for the best” or “right” because she’s all grown up and doesn’t need his help anymore, and death is a good narrative way to bring across these ideas. Because, regardless of how Senketsu’s character looks on a surface level, he *wasn’t* wise and experienced. Not in the slightest! He was literally under a year old, hardly got to live life, and grew *with* Ryuko as her equal.

It’s true that *Kill la Kill* is immensely tropey and that killing off the mentor character wouldn’t be unusual. But *Kill la Kill* is also about subverting these tropes, too, and as much as Senketsu might resemble a typical mentorly character at first glance (explored in more detail here²), that kind of interpretation falls apart when you really consider his actual *character* behind what he looks like. He was just as young and inexperienced as Ryuko was, and his death is *not* the death of a proud dad, but a teenager who’d essentially just “come to age” in his own right, only to have his life be taken away from him.

And that’s just not “for the best” at all.

So much *Kill la Kill* discussion revolves around saying, “There’s *more* to it than just fanservice!” and explaining why it’s lovable despite how it looks. Why, then, is this kind of sentiment hardly true for conversations about Senketsu, who, when you *look beyond the surface*, is so much more than just a sailor uniform, and not at all the wise mentor figure he might *appear* to be?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 2, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/145328566960/it-occurs-to-me-after-reading-your-post-about-why>

Tags: #also on a lighter note i was thinking about his eyepatch some more and #i was reminded of jubei-chan #(where that screenshot comes from) #and how there was a whole arc about jubei overcoming the sight weakness that comes with wearing an eyepatch in battle #and it is ridiculous and hilarious and i would have loved something similar with Senketsu #like senketsu trying to help out ryuko in battle but he can't see right and it just messes her up #if anything it would really help push the idea that the staff seemed to be going for with the patch #in that he still has room to grow and evolve too

1. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/90923453499/from-the-anime-expo-kill-la-kill-panel-with-sushio>
2. <https://taylorramage.wordpress.com/2015/05/27/sentient-sailor-uniforms-are-serious-business-trope-twisting-in-kill-la-kill/>

SENKETSU'S GOOD EYE

Anonymous asked: Looking at that perspective shot of Ryuko looking down at her chest [from episode 5, when Senketsu sighs about Ryuko's "salty" blood], it suddenly dawned on me that maybe Senketsu's eye is almost always facing up is because what he's always staring at is Ryuko.

There are many things that separate Senketsu from Junketsu, but a real crucial piece is that he legitimately cares about the well-being of those who wear him.

Junketsu doesn't really spend a lot of time looking at—or after—its wearers. When transformed, it tends to focus on whatever its wearer is, and that's that. Not Senketsu, though. Especially once he and Ryuko fully synchronize in episode 3, you might argue that he spends *more* time looking out for Ryuko in battle than looking at the enemy. I think this screenshot from episode 15 does a good job highlighting the difference between the two Kamui, with Senketsu focusing solely on Ryuko (who is wearing him), and Junketsu focusing not on its own wearer Satsuki, but on Ryuko, the opposing side.



Of course, there's a lot of variation happening and these are honestly super small details, but this is the general pattern I've seen.

Where it gets kinda interesting, though, is when Satsuki wears Senketsu. With lines such as, "Can you imagine how much of a strain Satsuki is bearing

to let me fight?,” it’s made abundantly clear that Senketsu cares about Satsuki. He doesn’t want to hurt her, and understands that she’s pushing herself just to work with him. And he does definitely look out for her, absolutely. But in the end, he’s doing all this to save Ryuko, and she does seem to be his primary focus. He’s often shown looking towards Junketsu!Ryuko rather than Satsuki herself:





Maybe I'm cherry-picking or looking too deeply into it, but I actually intended to answer this ask with, "Senketsu really cares about his wearers and spends the bulk of battles looking after them, and this holds true even when Satsuki's wearing him," but in taking a closer look, I found that Senketsu... actually seems to pay a lot of attention to Junketsu!Ryuko in a way that he really doesn't with any other opposing force in the series.

Since saving Ryuko is Senketsu's main goal, perhaps this only makes sense, especially given his sentiment near the end of the episode that protecting Mako from Ryuko won't just protect Mako, but also Ryuko herself:

Senketsu: If you [Ryuko] killed Mako here, the one who would be hurt most of all would be you.

In the same way, Senketsu realizes that if Ryuko killed her sister, she'd never be able to forgive herself for it, and focuses the bulk of his attention on her so as to prevent that from happening. It's just kinda neat to actually see this reflected subtly in the visuals, especially since Senketsu *does* usually seem to pay the most attention to his own wearer in a fight, and doesn't here.

~~Or I'm just looking too deeply into it.~~

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 6, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/130664912035/looking-at-that-perspective-shot-of-ryuko-looking>

ENGLISH DUB SCRIPT

“YOU SAID YOU WANTED BLOOD. YOU GETTIN’ FULL NOW?” (Episode 2)

Senketsu: You’re bleeding too much, Ryuko.

Ryuko: You said you wanted blood. You gettin’ full now?

Senketsu: No, but in about five minutes, you’re going to lose consciousness.

Ryuko: Why didn’t you say that before?!

One thing I’ve noticed about the English dub thus far is that it seems to be a bit clearer in communicating early on that Senketsu cares for Ryuko than the more exact translations of the subs.

This little moment is one example. In the subs, it’s just:

Senketsu: You’re bleeding too much, Ryuko.

Ryuko: I thought you wanted blood.

Senketsu: At this rate of blood loss, you will lose consciousness in five minutes.

Ryuko: Don’t sound so calm about it!

But the dub adds some more to this. His response to Ryuko asking him if he’s “full” is like him saying, “Gurl, I could suck your blood forever but I don’t want you to pass out.” Pretty subtle, but it communicates more than the subs that Senketsu has a certain amount of concern for those who wear him, which is only furthered as the show goes along, of course.

There are some other examples, too. I understand that Senketsu’s voice in the dub is the one almost universally disliked for being miscast (which I have a whole ‘nother spiel about in the “Additional commentary” section on page 237), and goodness knows I love Toshihiko Seki’s performance, but David Vincent seems to be more blatantly obvious that Senketsu is *not* himself when he gets too fueled by his desire for blood. Particularly in Senketsu’s controversial first scene, the way Vincent delivers the lines has a

more pronounced element of insanity to it that makes it far more apparent that Senketsu's not exactly in the best state of mind there.

Which is *wonderful*. Senketsu and Ryuko's relationship often gets criticized for their first scene together, and though I highly dislike it myself, many miss the point that Senketsu has lost control and is not himself in that scene. So, it's probably a bit of an understatement to say that I'm really pleased that this has been made more apparent in the dub. It makes it far easier to see Senketsu as a caring individual when this is clearer.

One last scene of mention: the beginning of episode 4. In the subs when Mako pushes Ryuko out the door, Senketsu just hopelessly calls out her name. In the dub he cries, "Ryuko's abandoned me!" Which, to me, paints him as a more compassionate figure. It implies, "I care about this girl so much and she just leaves me to be murdered by these *assassins!*" (Plus, can I just say that it's adorable?)

Blatherings aside, I'm quite impressed with the English dub so far, especially concerning Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship. The script and performances are kept in-character, but executed in a way that makes it a bit more apparent that these two are really growing to care about each other, especially when it comes to Senketsu. Which only means that their big friendship moments in episode 5 will feel more organic and natural—awesome!

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 9, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/91305509310/ryuko-and-senketsu-exchange-episode-2-english>

“OH MY GOD, WOULD YOU QUIT ANALYZING ME?” (Episode 5)

Senketsu: He scares you, doesn't he?

Ryuko: Shut up.

Senketsu: You can't fight if you're not in the right state of mind.

Ryuko: Oh my God, would you quit analyzing me? You're *just* a piece of clothing, so for once can I wear you *without* getting a lecture?

Senketsu: A piece of clothing?!

Ryuko: Crap, he's coming. So no more nagging, got it?

So, I really like this dub line here.

In the original Japanese audio, Ryuko says something more along the lines of, “Stop nitpicking me!,” but *analyzing* has some different connotations that I actually think really add to the overall themes of the episode.

Episode 5's got a lot going on, of course, but the big thread is all about Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship—Aikuro even says as much in episode 6, made all the more clear in the dub where he claims that the whole thing with Tsumugu was just a plan “to make the bond between [Ryuko] and Senketsu even stronger!” But what's happenin' with their relationship here is... well. It's actually a lot of bickering. And the *why* for that I think goes perfectly with Ryuko's “analyzing” comment that the dub gives us.

In a lot of episode 5, Ryuko's not exactly respecting Senketsu enough as his own autonomous being, and he takes some offense to that. But part of the reason for it is that she plain isn't *getting* that Senketsu actually really cares about her, which is of course what gives the bathroom scene at the episode's end such power. Why she's not grasping this, though, has a lot do with his behavior.

I think a viewer can see as early as episode 2 that Senketsu has a lot of loyalty towards Ryuko and concern for her well-being, but at the same time, he's not particularly emotional or expressive about it. He's full of warnings, but they're not saying, “I don't want you to get hurt” (even if that is what I do think he ultimately means to say); they're instead very matter-of-fact and

scientific. While this does point towards compassion, Ryuko's not particularly used to getting much of that, and she can only read his know-it-all (and especially in the dub, downright *sassy*) commentary as something utterly robotic. The guy's basically like some warning system. He'll tell her what's wrong—and as the dub puts it, he'll *analyze* her—but those warnings are just that: warnings. She doesn't see much genuine affection behind them.

Which is what ends up being the real crux of the episode. Yes, Senketsu *does* care about Ryuko. A lot! Enough to risk his life to protect her, and to vehemently threaten anyone who'll hurt her. He's not just some robot or sailor uniform, but someone who does have feelings, even if he may have some trouble expressing them (maybe not so unlike Ryuko herself?)

I could write pages and pages about Senketsu's character arc, but for now let me just note that as the series progresses, he does become increasingly more and more emotive. Later episodes have him constantly bursting into tears and over-dramatically fretting over Ryuko, and while I do think that's in part due to his bond with her growing stronger, it's also because he's learning more about the world and more about his feelings. By the end of the series, he's seeing things as a lot more than just numbers and figures and “you have this long ‘til you pass out.”

I've gone on quite the tangent, but I love that the dub draws attention to Senketsu's very analytical, scientific side here, because it makes it that much more obvious that this aspect of him actually *changes* as the show goes on. It also helps make the aforementioned bathroom scene even more powerful, since it shows that Ryuko's really *not* seeing Senketsu as some caring, doting Daddy with all his warnings to her. (And funnily enough, she actually refers to *Gamagoori* as “Dad” in the episode 8 dub, after he tells her and Mako to be careful getting home.)

In any case, what I'm really getting at here is that, though Ryuko probably knows deep down that Senketsu's her friend and wants the best for her (and I'd definitely argue that she really *does* care about him as a person, even before episode 5), she still sees him a lot as some tool that won't stop with the blaring alarms. The “analyzing” comment is just a tiny little change, yes, but it adds a lot. Ryuko's shocked when Senketsu jumps out to protect her, and that's because she's shocked that anyone could care about her so much—especially someone who often just seems like some annoying, smart-ass robot.

And *that's* the crucial point. Fans may be quick to pin Senketsu as a

fatherly-type character (see “Is Senketsu Isshin?” on page 192 for more analysis on this), but Ryuko *never* seemed to view him that way herself. At the start of the series, she didn’t see much love and protectiveness in his warnings, had no feelings of, “Well, he’s like my parent and he knows what’s good for me and I’ll probably thank him later, even if right now I don’t like it!” She just saw it as something akin to your alarm clock getting you up in the morning: irritating and dispassionate. These clothes weren’t like her dad, but an obnoxious machine.

The dub’s use of “analyzing me” rather than “nitpicking” helps make this even clearer, and then with the reiterated, “He was protecting me!” in the bathroom scene... sheesh! I think it hits me a little harder.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 23, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/100808392640/oh-my-god-would-you-quit-analyzing-me-so-i>

RYUKO CALLS SENKETSU HER FRIEND (Episode 5)

Ryuko: Senketsu!

Senketsu: I'm here.

Ryuko: Oh, thank God.

Senketsu: Actually, you should thank that stranger.

Ryuko: Damn it, I can't believe I got my ass handed to me like that!
[Wincing in pain]

Senketsu: We're both in tatters. Don't push yourself.

Ryuko: Senketsu, I don't know how, but we need to get even stronger. I mean, we *can* get stronger. But only if we're together.

Senketsu: You said I was just a piece of clothing, remember?

Ryuko: That's not what you are.

Senketsu: Hm?

Ryuko: You're my friend.

Senketsu: [Gasp] I am.

Okay, last English dub writing for this volume, I swear! (And they're all from episode 5. Can you tell it's my favorite?)

So. The script for this scene I find really fascinating in regards to Senketsu's character, because with the dub, they've really upped the *sass*.

For one moment, in the original script, Ryuko says something along the lines of "I'm glad/What a relief/Thank goodness" when she sees that Senketsu's alright, and Senketsu responds by telling her that she "should thank that man." In the dub, Ryuko says, "Oh, thank God," which is a faithful translation. But then Senketsu is absolutely sassy with her when he says, "*Actually*, you should thank that stranger."

Senketsu's been sassy with Ryuko before (notably, the scene where he

claims he can't have a smug look on his face because he doesn't even have a face), so it's not like this is OOC. But I find it pretty funny that this was done, and it adds to Senketsu's know-it-all, I'm-so-wise attitude without having a voice that really gives off that impression the way Toshihiko Seki's performance does.

The more interesting moment, though, is how he actually calls Ryuko out on her treatment of him. In the original script, he agrees with Ryuko's comment that they need to stick together and get stronger, saying that yeah, he's important to Ryuko because he's her only outfit. I always thought he was referring to what Mako said in the bathroom scene with this—you know, "That's the only piece of clothing she has!"—but the dub has him outright wagging a finger at Ryuko. He tells her, "You said I was just a piece of clothing, remember?"

And... I see that as actually quite a bit of a change. The result is the same, of course; Ryuko says that no, you're not just clothes, you're my friend. But the way we're getting there is different, and it forces Ryuko to come to terms with the fact that she was *wrong* in how she treated Senketsu in a way that you just don't get with the original audio.

Which I think is good. Respect is an important part of any relationship, and if Ryuko and Senketsu want to be a good team, they do have to respect each other and realize when they're not. What really raises my interest about the change, though, is what it means for Senketsu's character.

A huge aspect of Senketsu (in my opinion, anyway) is that he constantly devalues himself by nature of what he is. In episode 15 he's shocked again by this notion that Ryuko sees him as a friend; in the fourth drama CD he curses being born a sailor uniform because he feels so utterly useless¹, and in the episode 7 extended preview², he won't include himself as part of the family. (Which, to go on a little tangent, I really enjoy that the episode 8 dub did have Mako including him, when she tells Ryuko that she's not alone anymore.) With the original audio of this scene from episode 5, I always saw it as another example of this. In his mind, he's only precious to Ryuko because he's the only outfit she has.

But in the dub, there's a totally different feel. I'm almost inclined to say that Senketsu's expecting Ryuko to say she was wrong with all that sass, but he's still notably shaken up when she says that he's her friend. So, in the end, all that attitude feels even *more* degrading than what we get with the Japanese script. Ryuko's saying it's important they stick together, and he's saying,

“Pshh, yeah, right. I’m just a piece of clothing, and you said so yourself.” There’s not even the implication that he’s an *important* piece of clothing like the original dialogue gives us. He’s just being totally dismissive of himself, questioning that he could really mean much of anything to Ryuko.

Overall, I rather like this direction. Senketsu being a sailor uniform has led to many being very dismissive of him, both in-universe and out (seriously, Best *Mascot*, Newtype?!), and I appreciate that the dub’s more in-your-face about how he’s not just that by drawing more attention to the fact that Ryuko was wrong in brushing him off that way.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 27, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/101094236105/okay-last-english-dub-post-for-this-volume-i>

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/94519273240/senketsu-heavy-you-are-heavy-ryuko-i-told-you>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svD9N8jq1Lg>

RYUKO CONFIDES IN SENKETSU (Episode 13)

Senketsu: Are you afraid of me, Ryuko?

Ryuko: No, it's... *me* I'm afraid of. I could feel how much it hurt you. The more my rage-filled blood pumped into you, the more power I sucked out of you. You couldn't do anything about it, and... I could feel you crying out. I was way gone. But I could feel how bad I was hurting you. It didn't matter! I couldn't stop myself! And if Mako hadn't showed up when she did, I...

Mako [flashback]: Remember what you told me? How you wished you knew your dad better? How you wanted to find out why he died?!

Senketsu: Even so, don't reject me. I *want* to be worn by you. In fact, I think I was made solely for that purpose.

Ryuko: Did you get your memory back?

Senketsu: No, it's just a feeling I have. And each time I drink your blood, that feeling grows stronger.

It's that time again! And I'm diggin' the dub script for Ryuko's speech here. For reference, this is the more literal translation:

Ryuko: No, it's me that I'm afraid of. You were crying when all that went down. You were pulled into my mind as I rampaged out of control, got pumped full of rage-filled blood, had more power than you wanted pulled out of you, and you broke down and cried. Even then, I could tell how bitter your tears were. But in spite of that, I couldn't stop myself. If Mako hadn't shown up, I don't know what would have happened.

Of course, I will say that I'm not so sure what to think of the near complete removal of Senketsu's tears in the dub; after all, I really do feel like the idea of *not crying* plays a big role in Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship. The tears mentioned here come up again in episodes 17 and 20, and I'm curious how the dub will handle that, since Ryuko's not focusing so much on the crying here, only mentioning that she "could feel [him] crying out" and that's

it.

But—and one reason I really do like what was done with the script here—the dub’s minimization of the crying proves more effective to me at cementing this fact that *Ryuko had hurt Senketsu*. It’s far more direct about it; Ryuko outright says variations of, “I could feel how bad it was hurting you” twice.

The literal translation just doesn’t emphasize this as much. Any hurting Ryuko does is described *just* through crying and tears. And yes, those certainly also get across the idea that Ryuko had harmed him, but crying has a lot of other connotations as well.

For instance, I’ve heard it mentioned that Senketsu broke out into tears when Ryuko lost control because he felt her grief and, essentially, he cried for her. I can definitely see where this is coming from, but I think it’s rather missing the mark, as well as robbing Senketsu of his autonomy.

Senketsu has his own will and his own emotions. While he’s certainly aware of Ryuko’s sadness over losing her father, he’s also aware that he doesn’t want to consume her. By these episodes, we’ve seen time and time again that Senketsu greatly cares for Ryuko and that it’d be his last wish to hurt her. He cries not just because he feels Ryuko’s grief, but because that grief becomes incredible anger and transforms them both into a monster that could kill her. He cries because she’s hurting him, her rage twisting him into something that he doesn’t want to be—something that harms instead of helps.

So, I mean, I love what *not crying* means for these two and all, and again, I’m not so sure how to feel about how it was nearly completely removed in the dub, but the directness of this fact that *Ryuko had hurt Senketsu* is something I really appreciate.

Because honestly? *That’s* always what I’ve viewed to be the heart of this scene. Not merely that Ryuko couldn’t control herself, but that she couldn’t control herself and she harmed one of her only friends because she couldn’t. And even worse, she *knew* she was hurting him, and yet she still couldn’t stop herself.

Though it’s not directly addressed here in 13, that little detail plays into one of Ryuko’s biggest insecurities. Episodes 7 and 20 show us that she yearns for love and a family, but I would argue that she wonders deep down if she really deserves it. Here, after losing control, she pushes everyone away and gets mad at Nagita for treating her like some sort of hero worthy of

respect and admiration. She ponders if it's safe to wear Senketsu again in an early scene that, considering this conversation, screams to me, "I can't wear you because I'm terrible and can't be trusted and I'll just hurt the people I care about." And with the way she'd harmed Senketsu, she must be thinking, "Well, maybe I really am best alone."

Ryuko gets a lot of shit for her "monster" arc come episode 20, but unpopular opinions here, I see it as suiting her character well and being pretty freaking sad. Not being human just gives her one more reason to think herself unworthy of what she desires the most.

Well, I'm rambling. My point is, this scene is all about Ryuko coming to terms with how she'd hurt Senketsu and I appreciate just how in-your-face the dub is about that.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on December 19, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/105608699685/kill-la-kill-english-dub-ryuko-confides-in>

VOLUME 4 ENGLISH RELEASE

Interesting details from the American Volume 4 release of *Kill la Kill*:

- At the end of episode 15, Ryuko tells Satsuki she’s “alone” because she isn’t working with Junketsu like Ryuko and Senketsu work together. Satsuki says that having a symbiotic relationship with Life Fibers is utterly ridiculous. In the more literal translation, Ryuko says something along the lines of “What?” to that. In the English dub, she says, fiercely, “It ain’t.” I really like how much more assured that sounds, because Ryuko *is* utterly assured of that. She trusts Senketsu an incredible amount and has a lot of faith in him.
- I’m utterly amused by how Ryuko seems much more irritated by some of Mako’s antics in the dub. It’s like Mako’s her hyperactive, uncontrollable daughter. But more seriously here, I think this highlights just how much Ryuko *doesn’t* particularly respect or trust Mako yet in a way that I didn’t especially get with the original performance, which will help make the moment in episode 22 (examined more on page 111) where she *does* start giving Mako some credit even more powerful.
- Episode 16 (aka, the info-dumpy alien episode) gives Senketsu a more expressed fear of devouring Ryuko than in the original. I like this little detail because it kinda goes back to what happened in episode 12—Ryuko got angry, couldn’t control herself, and Senketsu then lost control with her, “devouring” her. Senketsu hated this and it made him cry. This “eating Ryuko” attitude is also kinda how he acted in his awful first scene, which I wish forever we could have seen him apologize for. While these additions aren’t quite there, it *does* help further cement the fact that Senketsu cares for Ryuko a ton and is horrified at the thought of seeing her just as his “food” more explicitly than the original script.
- After Ryuko and Senketsu’s heart-to-heart in episode 17, Aikuro reveals the story of Tsumugu’s sister, Kinue. He explains that after Kinue died, Isshin/Soichiro kept working at it and eventually made Senketsu. He then goes on to say that Senketsu had been spliced with Ryuko’s DNA. In the original script, that’s all that’s said. But in the English dub, there’s

this curious bit: “So Dr. Matoi kept going with the experiments until he figured it out and made Senketsu. His breakthrough came when he spliced Senketsu’s Life Fibers with [Ryuko’s] central nervous system’s DNA.” I’m mostly focused on the “figured it out” and “breakthrough” parts, which weren’t in the original at all. What it means to me is that Isshin/Soichiro learned that Life Fibers by themselves are essentially nothing but feral monsters, and the only way to get them to work with you is to make them partly human. This is why Junketsu is so different from Senketsu—Senketsu is both human *and* clothing, but Junketsu is only clothing. While it could be argued that this is implied in the original script, I appreciate how much more in-your-face it is in the English dub because I think this is an important concept that often gets neglected. Additionally, it’s interesting to me because, with knowledge of later episodes, this means that Isshin/Soichiro consciously made someone just like Ryuko for her to work with.

- At the start of episode 19, Ryuko refuses to believe Ragyo is her mother. Ragyo points out that Ryuko’s healing abilities show that it’s true. In the original script, it’s just left to that. In the English dub, she adds, “It’s heredity, dear.” I find this pretty funny because it’s *not* heredity—it’s the result scientific experiments. But I really like this line because I think it adds to Ryuko’s sense that there’s something inherently wrong with her that’s been wrong ever since she was born.
- When Senketsu gets angry at Barazo commenting about the “inhuman” nature of Ryuko’s healing abilities in episode 19, Aikuro tells him to calm down, since, even if nobody can hear his voice, they all understand how he feels. In the original script, that’s pretty much all that’s said, with a note on how Senketsu had dragged Ryuko’s body to safety after the events in the beginning of the episode. In the English dub, Aikuro adds, “When that place blew, you didn’t freak out. You dragged Ryuko to safety. You need to stay calm. For her.”
 - And well, I love this a lot. One thing about Senketsu is that, while he may become very over-emotional at times (and especially in the latter half of the series), when it comes to serious situations, he’s very calm and collected. I was initially a little

taken aback by the rather understated response Senketsu had to Ryuko getting overtaken by Junketsu, since, again, he can be very emotional. But I think Aikuro's extra line here points exactly as to why he was that way—he keeps it together for Ryuko's sake. If he let his emotions overpower him then, would he have been able to save her? This is also something that comes up when he dies, in which he's very calm in order to soothe Ryuko and make it easier on her.

- (Of course, Aikuro's line is also kinda funny because in the fourth Drama CD¹, Senketsu cries like a baby when he finally finds Aikuro after hopelessly dragging Ryuko along.)
- Even more from episode 19, Ragyo draws more attention to Isshin/Soichiro's cruelty than the original script does, saying, "Soichiro faked his death, leaving *you* [Satsuki] behind to mourn him." In the original, it was just, "Soichiro faked his death and entrusted his revenge to you." Still cold, but the English dub emphasizes that Satsuki *suffered* all because her father didn't tell the truth much more explicitly than the original script does.
- Did they... dub over baby Ryuko's crying? Why?
- It might have just been cut for timing, like how they had to cut Tsumugu's catchphrase down in English, but I'm a little saddened at the removal of Satsuki's mention that Ragyo had never named her little sister. It's a small detail, but I think it really highlights Ragyo's inhumanity in a powerful way.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on February 27, 2015

URL:

<http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/112288052232/blatherings-about-the-kill-la-kill-volume-4>

1. <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/post/94553062460/h0saki-senketsu-is-carrying-the-unconscious>

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT’S CALLED, BUT MAKO AND SENKETSU ARE MORE THAN FRIENDS!” (Episode 22)

English Dub	Official Subtitles
Ryuko: You don’t even know what friends are! These guys are something else, something better! I don’t know what it’s called, but Mako and Senketsu are more than friends!	Ryuko: The word “friends” doesn’t come close to covering it! They’re something more, something I can’t explain! That’s what Mako Mankanshoku and Senketsu are to me!
Mako: Really, me too?!	Mako: What, me?!
Ryuko: Yeah, you too! You’re like the most persistent chick I ever met! You didn’t care if I pushed you away. You kept coming back and coming back like a yo-yo!	Ryuko: Yeah, you! I can’t tell if you’re weak or strong! Like a woman who barges into your heart when you’re not looking!
Ryuko: And Senketsu here, what the hell? Here’s a piece of clothing that cries and laughs and worries about me!	Ryuko: Or someone who cries, laughs, and genuinely worries about me even though he’s clothing!
Ryuko: I’m surrounded by people that actually give a damn about me, and they’re all batshit crazy! I don’t know if I deserve ‘em, but I sure as hell ain’t gonna let ‘em down!	Ryuko: Bat-crap crazy people like that try their damndest to help me! And I have to live up to that craziness!

Senketsu and Mako are wildly different characters, but their arcs are actually remarkably similar. Both deal with gaining self-respect after a history of being belittled and stigmatized, and, regarding their relationships with Ryuko, they each downplay their own significance to her.

Mako constantly gushes about how much Senketsu means to Ryuko. She describes them as friends before anyone else does, and repeats on multiple occasions that Ryuko loves him more than anyone else. Senketsu, meanwhile, struggles immensely with the concept of Ryuko seeing him as anything more than her only uniform. He feels Mako is Ryuko’s most important person, thinking that she is the only one who can calm Ryuko and get her to relax, and he would willingly die protecting Mako from the

brainwashed, Junketsu! Ryuko—killing or even *hurting* Mako would absolutely break Ryuko, but he doesn't think the same applies for himself.

But as we see in the wedding-crashing scene, *both* Senketsu and Mako are Ryuko's most important people, and both have the power to bring her to her senses. Both are there playing a huge role in saving her, and—contrary to what Senketsu believes—it is when Ryuko attacks *him* that she realizes she is hurting both of them and ultimately snaps out of it.

When I first watched the English dub of Ryuko's "Power of Friendship" speech pictured here, I was immediately taken in by how the script draws slightly more attention to these ideas than the original. We clearly see Senketsu's reactions in all versions—he bursts into tears when Ryuko says he's warm and comfortable and that she never wants to take him off again, and gasps at the idea that he's as much her important person as Mako is. But when Mako asks, "Really, me too?!" in the English dub instead of "What, me?!", we get more from Mako's side of this. Just as Senketsu, she's shocked that Ryuko thinks so fondly of her.

Ryuko's response then adds even more. Instead of just having it be about the wedding-crashing scene as in the original script, she talks of their relationship as a whole, really coming to terms with her behavior of pushing Mako away (both emotionally and literally), and recognizing that it's not fair to do this to *any* of her friends, no matter how much she feels she doesn't deserve them.

Are these huge dialogue changes? No, definitely not. But I find it adds a lot to a huge scene, drawing more attention to the fact that Mako doesn't realize how much she means to Ryuko just as Senketsu doesn't, and having Ryuko really express that *yes*, she *has* pushed her friends away, but she's determined to stop putting them through that and live up to what they think of her.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on December 3, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/134511576960/kill-la-kill-episode-22-tell-me-how-you-feel-tv>

Additional commentary: This post became a part of a good discussion regarding platonic relationships. For more on the subject, 1 below includes the entire conversation.

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/134777767165/jragonjreams-phix-fuckyeahryuketsu-kill-la-kill>

Anonymous asked: What do you think Ryuko's relationships with Senketsu and Mako are, (Like how she feels about them) they seem to be the most important people in Ryuko's life and idk i'm curious to see your interpretation. Also as a side note, many times in the show Mako would sometimes say "Remember, Ryuko-chan, Senketsu's not your only friend, i'm here too." and while that was never really talked about by anyone in the show I thought it was interesting and wondered what it meant?

As of episode 22, Ryuko places Senketsu and Mako on the same level of importance in her life, saying that they're both "more than friends" after they both entered her heart and saved her from Junketsu. Take this as you will.

I actually find the English dub of this scene interesting, though, and there are some rather notable dialogue changes that seem relevant to this discussion:

English Dub	Official Subtitles
Ryuko: You don't even know what friends are! These guys are something else, something better! I don't know what it's called, but Mako and Senketsu are more than friends!	Ryuko: The word "friends" doesn't come close to covering it! They're something more, something I can't explain! That's what Mako Mankanshoku and Senketsu are to me!
Mako: Really, me too?!	Mako: What, me?!
Ryuko: Yeah, you too! You're like the most persistent chick I ever met! You didn't care if I pushed you away. You kept coming back and coming back like a yo-yo!	Ryuko: Yeah, you! I can't tell if you're weak or strong! Like a woman who barges into your heart when you're not looking!

The first part is pretty much the same—Senketsu and Mako are more than friends. But after that, it's slightly different. At Ryuko's declaration, Mako asks, "Me too?" in the English dub, and Ryuko answers this with, "Yeah, you too." Though this is rather implied with the original script, I really like how the dub makes it clearer about the fact that it's not just Senketsu Ryuko is talking about, since I think this reflects a larger piece of the show as a whole.

It's my *personal interpretation* that Mako has spent much of the series not feeling as significant in Ryuko's life as Senketsu, which can (at least partially) explain some of her dialogue about them:

Mako: Ryuko loves her uniform more than anything on the planet!

Mako: After all, the reason you wear Senketsu is because you love him best, right?

Mako: Senketsu is your friend and your Sunday best! He's going to cling to you forever and ever...

And so on. So, *in my opinion*, she reminds Ryuko that "Senketsu's not [her] only friend!" because she feels like she has to—she loves Ryuko so much, but she's afraid Ryuko can't see it. I also get this impression from "Light your heart up," her character song.

This begs the question: *why* does she feel Ryuko can't see it? I think the English dub script answers part of that when Ryuko says, "You [Mako] didn't care if I pushed you away. You kept coming back and coming back like a yo-yo!" On an emotional level, I see this as reflecting a lot of Ryuko's early behavior around Mako. I've always seen it that Ryuko is afraid of opening up to people, so she distances herself from them—pushes them away. With Mako at the start of the series, she's hesitant to begin a friendship (episode 1), she's silent and disconnected when eating with her family (episodes 2, 5), and she keeps a lot of her concerns and feelings bottled up and doesn't confide in Mako about them (episodes 2, 3, 5, 7, 13). When Mako scolds her family for judging Ryuko in episode 5 for talking to Senketsu (and Mataro, in episode 6), I see that as her saying, "Well, Ryuko needs *someone* to talk to." (Of course, I also see it as more complicated than that, and have expanded on it on page 259, but for the sake of brevity, heh...)

Essentially, though, Ryuko has struggled to be emotionally open with people and with Mako, which she realizes by the time of episode 22. I love how the dub talks about this, because instead of just making it about the wedding scene as in the original script, it's more representative of their relationship as a whole, which I find more fitting and heartfelt. No matter how much Ryuko tried to keep Mako away at first—and *literally* as well, as Ryuko's had a history of trying to keep her out of the fights—Mako kept sticking by her side. It's a powerful moment for both of them when Mako

can see that Ryuko's always found her important, and when Ryuko can finally express that.

So, those are my ideas! If you're interested in more thoughts about Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship, I can point you to my embarrassing-long page 211 master essay about that.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 27, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125223215310/what-do-you-think-ryukos-relationships-with>

OST

“BEFORE MY BODY IS DRY”

Let's talk “Before my body is dry.”

As far as I can tell, the song is largely Ryuko singing to Senketsu, with Senketsu joining in with the rap portions. So, the “you” in the song, as sung by the female singer (Mika Kobayashi) representing Ryuko, seems to be referring to Senketsu. This is especially evident in the opening lines, recounting how Ryuko and Senketsu first met in the most literal of terms:

In the dusty basement [sic] where we met
May you surprised me so much
Because you're talking now

But then you get to the end of the song and the line, “Do you remember what he said” comes right outta nowhere, and I dunno about you, but I'm doing a double take. Where the heck did this “he” come from? Is Ryuko quoting what “he” said in the chorus, and if so, how much? Or is she just asking a question?

The only “he” that would make sense coming from Ryuko—if it's not Senketsu—is her father. And yeah, Isshin telling Ryuko not to lose her way seems like a feasible thing he could have said to her. But it gets confusing with the next two lines:

We have to be as one
Don't be afraid my sweet heart

“We have to be as one” looks like it's pretty obviously referring to Ryuko and Senketsu. With the sweetheart line, though, it could again be Ryuko talking to Senketsu, but it could also be Ryuko continuing to quote Isshin, which seems to be supported by the official Japanese translation of the song. For this particular line, it is translated as “愛しの娘よ,” which, far as I can tell, can be translated back into English as something along the lines of “beloved daughter.”

So, it all again begs the question. What exactly is Ryuko quoting, and what is she saying to Senketsu with her own words?

Regardless of the Japanese translation, I've always liked to read the song as one entirely between Ryuko and Senketsu, with only the meme-tastic,

“Don’t lose your way” line being a quote from Isshin. Looking at the chorus, this interpretation makes a lot of sense:

Don’t lose your way in your mind
We have to be as one
Don’t be afraid my sweet heart
This is the way to be more strong
Harbor my deep secret
It makes me so blue
Run through this game before my body is dry

“This is the way to be more strong” is Ryuko coming to terms with what’s said in “I want to know,” Isshin’s song to her, in which there’s the line, “You’ll be stronger for real.” Ryuko sees that this means being with Senketsu, and tells him so.

“Harbor my deep secret” and “It makes me so blue” refer to how close Ryuko and Senketsu have to be to work together, since, as the third episode tells us, Ryuko has to open herself up to Senketsu (“get naked”) in order for them to be a proper team. This means he’s gonna be seeing her secrets, and the “deep secret” in question is the fact that regardless of how tough she is, Ryuko is actually very lonely and tenderhearted—a secret that Senketsu learns pretty early on (at the very latest, by episode 5). By episode 17, he even says flat-out that he knows it, telling her he understands what kind of person she is, no matter what she says about it.

“Run through this game before my body is dry” pretty much speaks for itself. Ryuko has to finish these battles before Senketsu drinks up too much of her blood.

Conversely, though, keeping that Japanese translation in mind, “This is the way to be more strong” could easily just be another quote from Isshin that Ryuko’s relaying back to Senketsu. The “deep secret” could also be Isshin referring to Senketsu himself, which makes Isshin feel “blue” because by taking the scissor blade and Senketsu, Ryuko’s lost her chance at having a peaceful life. The only two lines here that don’t make any sense being Isshin quotes are, “We have to be as one” and the last one, “Run through this game before my body is dry.”

Ultimately, both scenarios and mixtures of these scenarios are possible when it comes to the meaning behind the song. But I’ve just gotta say that I’m really fond of that first one, even if official material does appear to shoot

it down at least partly. This is Ryuko and Senketsu's song, and for that reason, it doesn't sit right with me to think that most of the chorus could just be Ryuko quoting her father.

What do you think?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 21, 2014, as a response to uniform-boyfriend's post questioning the song's "sweetheart" line

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/92429356765/uniform-boyfriend-so-in-before-my-body-is-dry>

Additional commentary: This writing is only part of a discussion regarding "Before my body is dry." For more on the subject, 1 below includes the entire conversation.

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/92729653395/fullmetalheart01-uniform-boyfriend-so-in>

“BEFORE MY BODY IS DRY” UNRELEASED MUSIC BOX ARRANGEMENT

A mellow, music box-sounding instrumental of “Before my body is dry” plays six times in the series¹, and always in scenes that showcase the softer sides of Ryuko’s personality. It’s the kind of song played for the sweet, heartwarming moments; every time, Ryuko lets go of her cool, tough girl persona and allows the viewer—and the other characters—to see beyond it. She’s not just some angry, revenge-seeking teen, but a person with vulnerabilities, just as anyone.

While these moments are focused on both friends and family, I take particular note on how this tune especially supplements the scenes of Ryuko opening herself up to Senketsu. In the show’s first handful of episodes, just about every quiet, tender moment between them has this song playing in the background—whether it’s Ryuko completely letting her guard down to hold Senketsu close, revealing to him very personal information, or just light-heartedly joking.

Interestingly, the song is never heard again after episode 8; at that point, similar moments—such as Senketsu assuring Ryuko that she’s a good, kind person in episode 17, or Ryuko and Satsuki reaching an understanding in episode 22—tend to use instead “MT 変装型 8☆極★服,” a track that is half-epic, half-somber, but still an instrumental using the “Before my body is dry” theme. Given the darker, more serious turn the series takes in its latter half, I suppose it’s sensible. A cutesy, whimsical music box tune may not fit so well when these characters are literally bearing the weight of the world on their shoulders.

Still, though the song is not particularly played much at all, it’s one of my more favorite tracks from *Kill la Kill*. It’s a wonderfully sweet arrangement of “Before my body is dry,” and an excellent song to underline Ryuko’s growing relationships with the Mankanshokus and especially Senketsu—after all, “Before my body is dry” *is* their song.

I wish it had been released on the OST.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on January 3, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/136566237740/kill-la-kill-background-music-episodes-4-5-6>

1. <http://pastebin.com/7bC8H7S5>

“BLUMENKRANZ”

The eerie, haunting “Blumenkranz” is a song often interpreted to be Ragyo’s. It’s her theme, after all, (nearly) always played in association with her character.

Yet, is it *really* Ragyo’s song, when you look closer and examine the lyrics¹? Could it instead be a song about Ragyo’s *daughter*, Satsuki, and her views on the world prior to her character development and grand moment of realization in episode 22? With lines such as, “I want to become stronger/because our World is very cruel,” it certainly fits Satsuki’s early mindset of natural selection. Her primary concern was becoming stronger in order to beat her mother, and she did what she thought she must do so—often using people as little more than tools in the process, and doing away with those who weren’t useful.

All this is true. However, I would argue that it limits the potential of the piece. Taking “Blumenkranz” with Ragyo in mind is far more compelling, and points to a much more layered, interesting villain than what is seen directly in the show.

So how *could* “Blumenkranz” fit Ragyo? Well, much like Satsuki at the start of the series, Ragyo also follows a mindset of natural selection. She sees herself as the closest thing to divinity for being infused with the Life Fibers, and her whole plan is about humans accepting their place as pawns in the Life Fibers’ goal to spread their seed across the universe. The human race has to die for this to happen, and Ragyo sees this as the way things *should* be—Life Fibers are godly, and humans just a necessary sacrifice for them to continue their conquest.

So the “withered flowers” that “Blumenkranz” references could very well be a general statement about the entire human race. Once flowers are withered, they’re useless. Once humans have reached a certain point, they too are useless to the Life Fibers and must be destroyed so they can go spread their seed elsewhere.

As mentioned, Satsuki’s character development in episode 22 has her realizing that she was employing the same methods as Ragyo in that she was just using people as tools and doing away with anyone who wasn’t a valuable asset to her. So, yes, “Blumenkranz” fits her in this sense as well, but I’d argue that it’s because of Ragyo that it does. It’s the classic, “hero tries to stop the villain but becomes just like the villain in the process.”

And Satsuki gets this development. She realizes she's wrong and being just like her mother, but notably, it's the revelation of Ryuko as her sister that really pushes her in this direction. Prior to that she was very firm in her beliefs and didn't question herself, but then she gets hit with the fact that she'd been using one of the very people she'd been fighting for as a mere tool. *That's* when she understands just how wrong she'd been.

But "Blumenkranz" is interesting in that it has a recurring line of, "Why do you look so sad?," which doesn't fit Satsuki at all. It's questioning the methods, and by the time Satsuki's doing that, she's definitely not going around still preaching about "removing withered flowers." Essentially, "Blumenkranz" looks to me like someone trying to justify to themselves what they're doing while having this feeling deep down that it's not right. And that's just not Satsuki.

Now, applying that to Ragyo? Daaaang the implications. Especially considering her line in the finale about "still having something of a human heart left," it definitely adds some depth to the character. She's telling herself that destroying the world is what's *right* and *how it should be*, but something inside her still has these second thoughts. It's particularly haunting when you link the repeated line, "You whisper in my ear" with the fact that Ragyo has been officially stated to be the Life Fiber's messenger, and that, while others humans can't hear them, she can².

I know, I know. This sounds awfully like some lame, "seduced by aliens" story that says Ragyo isn't *really* bad and shouldn't *really* be held accountable for her terrible actions! But believe me, that's about the farthest from the truth. When I argue this interpretation, it's *not* trying to throw a pity party for Ragyo or trying to excuse her behavior because she "wasn't in her right mind!" Doing that sort of thing bothers me immensely, and, for another *Kill la Kill* example, I hate how that's pretty much what happens all the time with Mako's behavior in episode 7. It gets romanticized up the wazoo even though Mako was *brutally beating Ryuko* and feels she could have *killed* her—and all over *money*! Yes, it's a *good* moment between them when Mako apologizes, yes she was being consumed by her own greed, but that doesn't excuse her actions, and she says as much herself (which I think is even more powerful in the English dub, too). What she did was still awful, and "not being in her right mind!" and "holding back!" doesn't make it okay. Similarly, I'll always be one to defend Senketsu's character for not being himself in his first scene, but, again, this doesn't make his behavior acceptable or excuse it.

I wish we could have seen him apologize like we did Mako.

Now, *actual* alien brainwashing for Ragyo? There might be an argument there that “excuses” her, because, when that happens, a person is *literally* not in control of themselves. But I don’t think that’s what’s happening with Ragyo, and I wouldn’t want it to be. It cheapens her character and takes away from the whole “compelling” bit that I think “Blumenkranz” adds. Saying your Big Bad was just brainwashed all along feels a little (or a lot) like a cop-out.

So, when I look to “Blumenkranz” for answers about Ragyo’s backstory, I want only to humanize her. She’s still a terrible, awful person and what she does throughout the series isn’t excusable, but I still want to know *why* she does it. Not feeling sorry for her for the reason, but simply understanding her better and better seeing her point of view. It leaves a much more compelling and frightening villain when we can see and recognize their motivations and reasoning, even if they’re undeniably bad and we don’t agree with them. It makes them seem less like distant, evil monsters and more like actual *people*, and that’s *scary*—it’s a reminder that you could turn out like that in certain circumstances, or that anybody could.

“Blumenkranz” is so creepy when taken from Ragyo’s perspective because it implies that even a self-assured, confident person as she seems to be still has doubts and feelings of uncertainty. It implies that even someone as evilly evil as *her* still has weaknesses and fears, and that’s far more memorable to me than someone who just does something unquestioningly “for the evilz” and that’s that.

Notes and Links

A synthesis of my posts and thoughts regarding “Blumenkranz,” originally written as responses to unshakable-resolve’s meta on the song (see 3 below), and posted on December 15, 2014

URL:

<http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/105308948952/unshakable-resolve-lets-talk-blumenkranz>

Additional commentary: As noted, this writing is only part of a discussion on “Blumenkranz.” For more on the subject, 4 below includes the entire conversation.

1. <http://kill-la-kill.wikia.com/wiki/Blumenkranz>
2. <http://forum.evageeks.org/thread/14370/Anime-Kill-la-Kill/1660/>
3. <http://unshakable-resolve.tumblr.com/post/105244943538/lets-talk-blumenkranz-obviously-its-most-well>
4. <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/105323338027/unshakable-resolve-marshmallowgoop>

“SUCK YOUR BLOOD”

murasakidoku asked: So the Kill la Kill soundtrack is awesome. (Everyone knows this.) But I started listening to it straight through just recently, and honestly, I think if you asked someone to figure out what KKK was about just through the soundtrack, and nothing else at all, I think they'd ask if it was a love story. I mean, seriously, "Before my Body is Dry", "Suck Your Blood," "Till I Die," they're all obviously about Ryuuko and Senketsu and their intimate bond. But there's always one thing that confuses me 1/2

and don't get me wrong, I love "Suck Your Blood" to bits because of its hard arrhythmic beat, the intensity, the rawness, and it's...not quite a Senketsu song, even though it's obviously Senketsu's song. Hell, it's probably the most violent lyrical composition I've heard come out of an anime soundtrack. "Smack your bitch up baby/Kick his head in now/Chop it off and take off"??? It's so out of character...unless it's meant to be that monsterlike pedigree of his, in which case 2/3 (i lied)

it seems odd to dedicate a WHOLE SONG to something like that. Anyway, I really love + agree with all of your analysis that I've seen you write on all matters senryu, so I wanted to know if you have any thoughts on this you'd care to share with us. 3/3

You know, when I was walking to the Park and Ride yesterday, “Till I Die” came up on my old-fashioned iPod and I got reminded on how much I kinda really wanna analyze the shit out of this soundtrack. So this message is just the perfect thing, heh.

That said, I *do* rather think that *Kill la Kill* is, at its heart, a love story. Maybe not the “typical” love story that most people are probably used to, with boy meeting girl and ending with them snogging into the sunset, but it is a very *shounen* story focused on friendship and the bonds that our protagonist makes with others. The most central of these bonds is the one she makes with Senketsu, which you can definitely see with the soundtrack, and of course within the narrative. I’ve already written an embarrassingly-long analysis about all that (page 211), but it’s really summed up best by what Ami Koshimizu (Ryuko’s VA) and Toshihiko Seki (Senketsu’s VA) said in an

interview¹ that I just can't stop quoting:

Toshihiko Seki: I think that a person's foremost wish is to "know one's self." Ryuko and Senketsu both said to each other, "I want to know you." I think it cheapens things to put this into words, but it is "love."

Ami Koshimizu: Senketsu and Ryuko are like family, like friends, like lovers, are in a very comfortable/close-fitting relationship. Had they both been human it would not have been possible for them to have this relationship. I think that is what this wonderful work depicted.

How anyone takes this "love" is up for interpretation, but *Kill la Kill* is all about the bond between these two and how it becomes strong enough to save the entire world. There's a reason the show's main song is a duet (and the *only duet on the soundtrack*) showcasing their bond, and there's a reason the TV ending and the OVA ending and the final box art are all focused on Ryuko's relationship with Senketsu: *that's* what the series sees as its most crucial element, and *that's* what it emphasizes and leaves with you in its last moments.

And getting back to the focus on the soundtrack, I definitely think it's pretty telling that of the six lyrical songs included on it ("Before my body is dry," "Blumenkranz," "Light your heart up," "Till I Die," "I want to know," and "Suck your blood"), half of them are about Ryuko and Senketsu. I think if you just listened to the songs without any context, you'd probably guess "I want to know" was about them as well—and interestingly, even people who *have* seen the show credit it as a Ryuko and Senketsu song, even though I'm personally about 99.99% convinced that the song's coming from Isshin/Soichiro.

(And as some asides, an argument may also be made about "Ambiguous," the second opening song to the series, which *was* apparently written with the show in mind, but I haven't seen any concrete information if it was intended as half Ryuko to Senketsu and half Satsuki to Ryuko, or just fully Satsuki to Ryuko. There may also be something to "Sirius," the first opening; the titular Sirius refers to the star, and Ryuko and Senketsu both get some "star" imagery associated with them ("Show them what it means to be a shining star" is a line from Senketsu in "Before my body is dry," and a reading you can get from Ryuko's name is "流星子²," which can mean either "meteor child" or "falling star child," which is reminiscent of how Ryuko falls to the Earth at

the end of episode 24, for a couple). I've also seen it mentioned that Sirius is a binary star, and that can easily extend to Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship at the end of the show—they are two in one, always together, and never truly alone.)

But in any case, Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship is really important narratively, so it makes sense for all these songs on the soundtrack (and maybe the openings) to focus on their bond. But I'm also incredibly baffled by "Suck your blood."

According to one fan-made chart³, the song (both the original and the [nZk] version), plays 20 times in the show. But though the song's pretty clearly from Senketsu's point of view, it's used concerning Senketsu all of once—at the end of episode 10, when Ryuko and Senketsu first activate Senketsu Shippu. On the whole, it seems to me to mainly be the standard "sexy" song, used largely for Nudist Beach, and particularly, Tsumugu. Even when it might be said to be used for Senketsu in episode 10, there's still a focus on Aikuro and Tsumugu while the song is playing.

So my question is—if Trigger needed a "sexy" song, why in the world make it from Senketsu's POV? Though he is a stripperific outfit, in terms of his personality, he's about the least sexual and perverted character on the show. I agree wholeheartedly with "Suck your blood" being totally out of line for him. And while it may be there to showcase his more monstrous side (as I suppose "Suck your blood" is fitting for how he behaves in his... controversial first scene), I'm also asking *why do that?*

A sexual song would make so much more sense coming from say, Aikuro rather than Senketsu. And the point of the *violence* is also a really interesting thing to consider. Senketsu may have been designed as a weapon, but he's not particularly violent himself. In battle he's calm and collected, quietly considering the situation and how best to win, and I don't think he really wants to hurt anyone. After all, when he loses it because of Ryuko with the whole berserk situation in episode 12, he cries not just for getting hurt by it himself, but also because it hurts Ryuko. So this thing about chopping off heads...? Seems pretty firmly un-Senketsu.

One way I could read the song is that it's indicative of how Tsumugu sees Senketsu. As I mentioned, the song's usually used for him (even often credited by fans as his "main theme"), and the huge plot point with Tsumugu is that Life Fibers are monsters, they only want to use you, and you'll end up consumed (violently) by them just like his older sister did.

What's going on in "Suck your blood" reflects that perfectly. Senketsu "doesn't want to go to sleep," so he sensually whispers to Ryuko to "let [him] suck it," that she's "gotta be put [him] on." I often make note of how incredibly flirtatious the song is, and I think that's pretty interesting when looking at it from this angle. It's like Senketsu's *seducing* Ryuko so that she'll wear him and he'll get to eat her. It also seems rather creepy to me at moments when he says things like, "If you love me baby," as though he's guilt-tripping Ryuko into doing what he wants.*

One of my absolute favorite moments from the show (if not my favorite) is when Ryuko hugs Senketsu close in episode 5 and Tsumugu sees how much they care about each other. But what if a part of Tsumugu can't help but think that Senketsu's just tricking her into loving him? In episode 12 he says, "I knew it" when he sees their berserk state, and in episode 20, he says something along the lines of, "Well, I figured the whole time that humans and Life Fibers couldn't get along." So even if he might somewhat understand that the two of them are friends, he's still incredibly biased and likely still sees this "seduced by aliens" story.

Honestly, you might say it's a little parental. With this reading, it's like Tsumugu's seeing Senketsu as the no-good boyfriend who's only gonna hurt his daughter. (And "Suck your blood" is one of the main reasons I will never agree with the "Senketsu is Ryuko's father/father figure" reading. If Trigger really *were* going for that, why in the world have this incredibly sexual, flirtatious song about them? It doesn't make any sense.)

But my silliness aside, the question remains of *why in the world have a whole song devoted to this?* Personally speaking, I think it's one of the more underdeveloped themes in the show that's really compelling and totally deserves to have a song about it. Senketsu loves Ryuko—he's horrified when he learns he might have just been using her as food the whole time, and he sounds just utterly devastated when he asks Ryuko if she's afraid of him in episode 13, when she's suffering from Heroic BSOD after the berserk incident. He doesn't want to be a monster and he's terrified by the idea of it. Meanwhile, Tsumugu has trouble getting over his (yes, justified) bias and has issues seeing Senketsu as anything other than that.

And I mean, I really, really dig that. I wish we got more of it in the narrative itself—and especially more with Tsumugu's sister Kinue and her dream.

Anyway, tl;dr, that's the only way I can really read the song—that it's

Tsumugu's impression of Senketsu. It's so wildly OOC otherwise and doesn't make much sense.

What do you think?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on January 31, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/109710022115/so-the-kill-la-kill-soundtrack-is-awesome>

Additional commentary: This writing is only a part of a longer discussion on "Suck your blood." For more on the subject, 4 below includes the entire conversation. Of particular note is the *d point, which I later conceded was a faulty interpretation and reinterpreted it.

1. <http://pastebin.com/DRSthFfY>
2. <http://sushiobunny.tumblr.com/post/76850838550/its-interesting-to-note-that-ryuukos-name-has>
3. <http://pastebin.com/7bC8H7S5>
4. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/109723642165/so-the-kill-la-kill-soundtrack-is-awesome>

“TILL I DIE”

“**T**ill I Die” messes me up.

I mean, I can’t make sense of all the lyrics completely, but what I *can* glean from it? It hits at just about everything that *tears me apart* about Ryuko and Senketsu.

On one level, it’s a song that emphasizes their partnership. Ryuko and Senketsu weren’t master and subordinate or mentor and student, but equals who grew *together*. “Till I Die” is all about a journey, and we got lines highlighting how far *both* Ryuko and Senketsu have come since the start. Senketsu notes right away that he too was “young and immature” when they began, and there’s the recurring bit of, “Time will tell us gently/How powerless we used to be.”

On another—and probably the most obvious—level, it’s a goodbye song from one loved one to another. The whole thing is testament to how much Senketsu cares for Ryuko. The chorus talks of leaving his soul by her side, of always being with her so she won’t be alone. And with such a crucial narrative surrounding Ryuko being all about gaining friends and family after growing up so lonely, this is something that hits and hits *hard*. But I see it as even more resonant, since this can also be seen as a callback to “Before my body is dry,” a song Ryuko and Senketsu sing together. There, the singer representing Ryuko states early on, “But I’m all alone/You’re the only one who can help me out,” and then later, “Don’t wanna be all alone.” With “Till I Die” saying “No one’s wanna be alone,” it’s hard *not* to see this as a direct reference. Being alone is Ryuko’s greatest fear, Senketsu knows this, and “Till I Die” is a song from Senketsu to Ryuko telling her that even as he dies, he’ll always be with her.

But what gets me the most about the song is that it’s a song about fate. This is even directly, literally referenced with the line, “Fate that you owe is cruel, still you swallow.” It’s probably as close to a criticism of Isshin/Soichiro’s methods that we’ll ever get from (a singer representing) Senketsu. Ryuko was just some big plan to her father, created as a weapon to be used to save the planet. This is exactly what the line refers to, with an extra note that no matter how cruel and terrible this is, Ryuko follows through with it anyway.

So where the song just really gets me? It’s how the whole thing puts Senketsu himself in the same place. He, too, is part of Ryuko’s cruel fate. The

main line of the song is even a blatant reference to this, saying, “Cuz I meant to be your piece until I die.” He was designed for her just so she could carry out this plan that she never decided for herself and never wanted.

And how does he take that? He *accepts* it. He says, “Don’t let me be your wound.” He says, “Wash off all you’ve been bound.” It doesn’t matter how much they’ve been through together, that he wants so much for Ryuko to “Always be safe and sound,” that he’ll pray for her—he was still unfairly bound to her, and, sure, he’ll always be with her, but he wants her to let him go as though he were nothing but a byproduct of her cruel fate.

So, I mean. This whole song? It’s Senketsu diminishing his own significance, *begging* Ryuko not to cry for him—and all because he cares about her so deeply and can’t stand to hurt her.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 17, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/121743557785/till-i-die-messes-me-up-i-mean-i-cant-make>

OVA

HOW COME MAKO COULD POWER HONNOUJI ACADEMY?

Anonymous asked: Hello! I was on the Mako wiki page when I saw a comment. "How come Mako was also a source of energy for the academy machine like Satsuki?" I replied with "It might have to do with Ryuko's blood that's still inside of her. From when she went inside Ryuko's head with Senketsu." But now I'm thinking. Did Mako have Ryuko's blood inside of her, like Ryuko had Mako and Satsuki's inside of her? Mako made a comment later about "the Ryuko in her head". Could you help explain? Thank you!

H^{mm.} I don't think it's the blood; as far as I know, Mako never made any contact with Ryuko's blood. What happens in episodes 21/22 is that Senketsu ends up taking both Satsuki's and Mako's blood, which Ryuko is able to feel when she wears him again.

But I really love Mako's comment about the "Ryuko in her head" in the OVA! I've always interpreted that to be a reference to episode 23, when Mako talks about the "Ryuko in her head" telling her to protect the Naked Sol because it's Ryuko's "home." But that's not the real Ryuko—it's a fantasy she's created. In the OVA, Mako says she figured out that the "Ryuko outside her head" is way better than the one inside her head, which I take to mean that the real Ryuko is much better than any idealized or wild fantasy that Mako has of her. I've always seen it that Mako really looks up to Ryuko, so when she says that, I understand it as Mako finally viewing Ryuko as an *equal*, and that it's better that way! Least, that's my interpretation, anyway...

But to the topic at hand: in canon, they don't give you any explanation for why Mako's a good source of energy—Rei outright says, "For some reason, she too has a potential to be a power source." For that matter, we don't get any explanation for Satsuki, either. I always thought of it like the genetic lottery; some people have this "potential," and some don't.

But then... I'm not even sure entirely what this "potential" entails. My best guess is that it's referring to a high tolerance to Life Fibers. After all, Aikuro tells us in episode 16 that Ryuko's "unusually high tolerance" to them is what allows her to be the only one who can pull off wearing Senketsu

correctly. Of course there's more to it than that, but I still think we can draw information from this. Having a high tolerance to Life Fibers obviously means that you'll be able to work better with them than someone who has a low tolerance, and from there I can extend it and imagine that you'll also work well as a Life Fiber activation source, as in the OVA.

This idea of tolerance is something that's also brought up again by Ragyo in the OVA, with her saying that the people of Rei's hometown showed high tolerance to Life Fibers. Interestingly, the English dub makes a point that these people were *test subjects*—an element that wasn't particularly expressed in the original. Since Ragyo takes Rei for having “potential,” I would assume that she herself has a high tolerance to Life Fibers (and would thus also be a good Life Fiber activation source), maybe because of some unknown “tests” that Ragyo was doing there...

So, then I wonder. Is it *really* just the case of a genetic lottery that causes a high tolerance to Life Fibers? Or is it more complicated than that?

It's a question that's a little too science-based for me to answer all that well, since I'm notoriously awful at that subject. But some others have spoken of the science behind Life Fibers and similar(ish) situations, and I've also spoken to my biology-major roommate on the topic, and from all these really neat analyses and interpretations, I *personally* lean on the idea that Life Fibers are more like parasites than one offered explanation of them being akin to mutagens. After all, the “parasite” comparison is a concept expressed multiple times by the series itself, and unlike mutagens, Life Fibers are organisms and *alive*. Aside from the few cases in the series that I'll talk about in a moment, Life Fibers in the body ended up killing the host—which is *not* what parasites want to do; they want to reproduce! Thus, instead, Life Fibers were *worn*. As such, I don't think it's likely that they do much on a genetic level, as mutagens do.

So then we get to the case of Ragyo. We're told she fused with the Life Fibers, and though I'm not sure *how* this happened, the end result is that they're living inside her body. This is still fitting for parasites—parasites live *on* or *in* a host. But when Satsuki and Ryuko are born, they don't have any Life Fibers inside them. Though it's possible to pass on parasites to offspring, it doesn't seem like that's the case here, and Ragyo sought to put them in herself. This all says to me that Life Fiber infusion doesn't cause some otherworldly change to the DNA—it just means that you're living with creatures in your body that somehow grant you amazing abilities.

As for *how* the Life Fibers grant such amazing abilities... I have no idea. I guess you could just go with “Rule of Cool,” since, well, this is fiction, and you can do whatever you want in fiction. So, you could go with the idea that Life Fibers are simply parasitic magic clothes that give you special powers just because that’s how their alien biology works.

I’ve strayed pretty far off the initial question, so—what about Life Fiber tolerance? If Life Fibers are parasites and Life Fiber infusion all about letting parasites into your body, what does that mean for tolerance?

In real life, there’s an evolutionary arms race. We evolve not to get destroyed by other organisms, so it’s highly possible to evolve to be resistant to parasites that hurt us. With *Kill la Kill*, though, it doesn’t seem like the Life Fibers are immediately harmful. Helping human evolution and giving you magic powers? Seems pretty good! I see no reason for evolution to make humans resistant to their influence—after all, evolution doesn’t know about the Life Fibers’ ultimate plot to destroy the Earth.

But interestingly, it seems the human body *does* recognize Life Fibers as alien substances, even when they’re just being worn, and that there’s a certain resistance to them initially. This is mentioned by Ragyo to Satsuki in episode 19:

Ragyo: You’re a crafty one. You knew if a human wore Life Fiber-infused clothing from birth to age 20, they’d lose all resistance to it. So you build an army of teenage soldiers thinking they’d be less susceptible against me? Really? That is the silliest thing I’ve ever heard.

So, if anything, you might argue that humans are evolving to become *more* tolerant to Life Fibers. I don’t know how much sense this makes biologically-speaking and regarding parasites, but it seems continued exposure to Life Fibers makes the body more acclimated towards them.

Going back to the original question, it’s interesting to note that Rei specifically chooses to use Mako over all the other students. This might be because she thought it would be most effective, since Mako has a personal connection to Satsuki, who Rei was particularly targeting, but Rei’s surprise at Mako’s ability to be a good source hints to me that it’s something more.

My theory? Mako is Ryuko’s best friend, who is a Life Fiber-infused being who’s constantly with Senketsu, a Kamui. Who’s to say that hanging around Ryuko and Senketsu so much didn’t up her tolerance to Life Fibers,

since continued exposure seems to make the body more tolerant? Going off the idea that high Life Fiber tolerance=good Life Fiber activation source, this would make Mako an effective source. And the same might be true for Satsuki and Rei—Satsuki probably grew up *surrounded* by Life Fibers, and with the mention of “test subjects” in Rei’s flashback, who knows what kind of Life Fiber business was going on there...

So, in the end, maybe there is something to the genetic lottery idea, but maybe there’s also something there about exposure. A combination of these factors—or either of them—might be the reason why Mako is such a good Life Fiber activation source.

Whew, that got really long! And I apologize for any biology mess-ups or misunderstandings on my part; as I mentioned, it’s not my high point, and I’d love to hear any corrections/other thoughts about this!

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 21, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/124725119340/hello-i-was-on-the-mako-wiki-page-when-i-saw-a>

For more Life Fiber science posts, see:

1. <http://herokick.tumblr.com/post/124498413062/in-this-post-i-will-be-sharing-more-interesting>
2. <http://argentdandelion.tumblr.com/post/136710418576/merging-with-life-fibers-genes-and-gestation>

DID SENKETSU “OUTGROW” BEING A UNIFORM?

bluestarii asked: Hey, I think I figured out something about the OVA! the whole thing about "growing out of uniforms", and yet Senketsu staying in Ryuko's heart and space? What if what it's supposed to be is both symbolism with Ryuko's character development, and a nod to the fact that Senketsu isn't a uniform like the last episode (And Ryuko) proclaimed, that he's human and a being of his own? So Ryuko grew out of needing Seketsu to fight and being mature, and Senketsu's more than a uniform and he grew too?

Yes, this is an interpretation I've seen, and one I quite like! *That's* a wonderful way to stay true to the heart of the series and a sweet way to end it.

But... opinions.

It's (probably?) no secret that I'm no fan of Senketsu's death. I've made my fair share of complaints about it, and I do hope that they're valid. But it's not the fact that Senketsu *dies* that's ever really upset me in terms of the writing. It's the way this death is handled.

There are many reasons, plot and character-wise, that Senketsu could die. Much of *Kill la Kill* revolves around fate; Ryuko was fated pretty much from birth to be the weapon that would stop her mother, and she was fated to work and be with Senketsu. One of her most quoted lines is during the Naturals Elections arc where she declares, "I'll take my own path, no matter what anyone else says!" So, I really get the sense that the show has a big message about screwing destiny and doing whatever you want.

Though Ryuko undeniably likes being with Senketsu, their meeting was still predestined by some other force. By having Senketsu die, then, there's quite the poignant meaning. The battle's over, Ryuko's finally freed of the fate that bound her—but this means both what she liked about it and what she didn't. It's sad, yes, but it definitely *works*.

Another way it could be done well is exactly how you've said. By the end of the show Senketsu *finally* sees that he's just as human as his wearer, and part of being human is the fact that one day you will indeed die. His death is then a tragic but perfect extension of what was said during the final battle. He's not just some outfit, but a person—mortal, fragile, limited. Again, really sad! But it still works.

Senketsu's death is by no means *necessary* to the story, but depending on its execution, it could pack a really great, emotional punch. I don't think episode 24 did this (and I don't think I'm alone in thinking that?), and I also don't think episode 25 helped any.

I remember reading a while back that Nakashima intended for *Kill la Kill* to be a story about a "girl outgrowing her sailor uniform." I can't find this interview again for the life of me so maybe I'm just remembering wrong, but regardless I think that sums up my issues surrounding the OVA. Because while the show may have been originally going for this, I just... don't really see it in the final product. Which is fine! Stories are monsters and they mutate like mad as you write them. At the end of it all, you'll have something totally different than what you started out with, and that's natural. Just the writing process.

But the OVA—and Senketsu's dying line—seem to be like, "Oh, right. What about that outgrowing sailor uniforms thing?" And it feels tacked on. An afterthought, rather than a solid conclusion to the themes and messages that *are* in the show.

Of course, "outgrowing sailor uniforms" is by no means a *bad* thing to be aiming for, and in a different show, it could have worked wonderfully! And gosh darn do I mean it, because I absolutely adore coming-of-age stories and *bildungsroman*. But when it comes to *Kill la Kill*, I never really got the sense that it fit into this genre. There's a big discussion on it that would make this post even longer should I go more deeply into it, but basically, I'll say that the characters feel a bit old for that type of story, being in their late teens, and that there also doesn't seem to be the *loss of innocence* that I see as a huge aspect of coming-of-age. Characters in *Kill la Kill* already are experienced with the world and fully aware of its cruelty, and while there certainly *is* character growth and self-discovery, I see that more as general character development than any big message about growing up.

But yeah, it's complicated. In any case, I've never read *Kill la Kill* as a story *mainly* concerned with showing Ryuko growing up. If this was the intent, then the sentient sailor uniform she "outgrows" would most certainly be a mentor/father figure. He'd be experienced and teach her the truths of the world, and in the end she'd be a matured lady with nothing left to learn from him. In that scenario, it'd make perfect sense for him to die and it'd make perfect sense for her to feel like she'd matured from him and "outgrown" him. It's a common trope, it's a sad trope, and again, it works.

But that's not *Kill la Kill*. That's not Senketsu. I've already written in great length about it (page 192), but essentially, the show makes it clear time and time again that Senketsu is Ryuko's equal, her friend, her partner. And he's actually *less* experienced than she is when it comes to the world! He's not her mentor or her father, and for the writers to run with this "outgrowing sailor uniforms" theme anyway then feels really wrong.

Now, moving on from the battle and letting the past rest? I can totally see that as a good way to conclude the show. With the idea of choosing your own destiny and breaking the strings of fate that bound you, the OVA does indeed work on a lot of levels and asks a lot of touching questions, too. What do you do with yourself once you are freed from fate? How do you move on? All great. I dig it.

And I'd dig it a lot more if Senketsu was handled as nicely. Ryuko needs to move on from his death and not drown herself in sorrow for his loss? Awesome! Perfect way to end the series. But it gets so... muddled.

First off, there are a million different ways to interpret what even happened with Senketsu. Is he dead and watching over Ryuko in the afterlife? Is he an imaginary space ghost? Is he a god? Is he in Ryuko's heart and together they get to live out Ryuko's greatest happiness for reals? Is he both literally in her heart *and* Life Fiber Clothing Jesus at the same time? Is he sharing Ryuko's body à la Birdy and Tsutomu and they just have to build him a new one? Is it like Wan and Raava where they're fused but (I presume) they can still speak to each other and maintain their own personalities? All of these could work in canon, and for something that's supposed to give closure, it's rather frustrating and confusing. What is even meant to be conveyed with such an ambiguous conclusion to Senketsu's story? If he's dead and the theme is moving on from fate, make it clear that he is indeed dead—don't complicate it.

Then the fact that the show ends with Ryuko pretty much flat-out saying that she's "outgrown Senketsu" (no matter how I like to read the line)... it leaves a really bad taste in my mouth. You're totally right in that it means she's done with the fight and I'll add that she's done with all that fate crap, but why have this outgrowing sailor uniforms theme so last second? It just doesn't fit with the rest of the show, and *that's* what gets me about the OVA. It only exasperates the issues of Senketsu's dying line. Senketsu's more than a uniform and he's Ryuko's friend and equal, so gosh darn it Trigger, *show* that in the OVA! Show that he "outgrew" being a uniform himself! Don't reduce

him to a mere garment like that and don't suddenly shove in a growing up message outta nowhere.

In any case, I love *Kill la Kill*. I even loved a lot of the OVA, and I don't mean to sound like the whiny, unsatisfied fan that I must be sounding like lately! (In fact, it's only due to this love that I can bother with writing out such a long analysis like this.) And who knows? Maybe with that tease going around with the NO COMMENT for *Kill la Kill* movies, there will be rebuild films that touch more into the interpretation you mentioned and provide what (at least I'll see as!) a better ending.

What do you think?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on September 8, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/97022616325/hey-i-think-i-figured-out-something-about-the>

DOES THE OVA MAKE A SENKETSU REVIVAL MORE OF A POSSIBILITY?

Anonymous asked: You know what really personal thing I liked about the OVA? That it can very easily make that "bring back Senketsu" fic canon. :)

When I mentioned in my tags that I wasn't quite sure what to make of episode 25, I guess what I really mean is that I'm not quite sure of what to make of Senketsu's role in it. (Because, apart from that, I'm totally satisfied with the OVA. It's ridiculous and over-the-top, with some intriguing character revelations and developments. Everything I enjoy about *Kill la Kill*.)

But *Senketsu*. I just... I don't really *get it*. Mako mentions early in the episode that Senketsu lives on in Ryuko and that Aikuro shouldn't worry about her. So at this point, I'm thinking, Okay, it's the usual theme of a loved one being dead, but living forever in your memories and heart. And that's really sweet! Ryuko obviously will miss Senketsu, but she's moving on from it and treasuring the good times they spent together.

And yet... we get near the end of the OVA and Ryuko declares that she can't lose now. She grips her heart where Senketsu used to be and says that she can't face him like this. He responds by blasting her Scissor Blades from freaking space and I am utterly confused. Has Senketsu pulled a Madoka and become a god? Or is it like the lyrics of "Till I Die" and he's left his soul with Ryuko... which somehow has enough power to chuck things outta outer space? In the epic fight scene it's made perfectly clear that he's with Ryuko in spirit; she talks to his "ghost," shifts to their synchronized form, and absorbs the Life Fibers at the end of the fight just like he always used to. But I'm just scratching my head. What does it mean?

Obviously, a big theme of the OVA is graduation. The rousing speech Ryuko makes during the battle is pretty much entirely about this, and at the very, very end, Ryuko holds her hand up to where Senketsu used to be again and we get this idea that she's "graduated" from wearing sailor uniforms. She comments earlier about the importance of "graduating" and letting the past rest, so I take her line here to mean that with all the Life Fiber threats on Earth now totally gone, she doesn't need Senketsu's power anymore. She's finally and completely moved on from their days of fighting together.

Mako's quick to remind her, though, that Senketsu will always be in her

heart. And Ryuko smiles all big at that and says, You're right! And then the thing just ends and it's so happy but I feel like bawling because I'm so lost and a lot of the ways I'm thinking about this are pretty freaking miserable.

Senketsu doesn't seem to be fully gone, but what does that mean for him, and for Ryuko? If he really is *literally* inside Ryuko and incapable of physically manifesting himself to her, then good gravy that makes me feel even worse than the episode 24 ending. The idea that he's still there and conscious but can't be her friend anymore—only a memory—that's just plain horrifying.

This has gotten quite long, but I do see what you mean, Anon. Perhaps, if he is inside her, he can be “extracted” in some way and be with her again. But the OVA is really unclear about it. Is being in Ryuko's heart just metaphorical (as I initially took it), or completely literal, since Life Fibers? Is he helping her out from the afterlife as some sort of angel or god?

I appreciate how the OVA expanded on Senketsu's dying line some more with the idea of “graduating” from the past and learning to move on, but, opinions, it wasn't really the closure I was hoping for. A peek in my analysis tag shows that I don't ever seem to stop yapping about how Senketsu is *more* than a uniform, and I'll always argue that point, since that's so much of what the show means to me. And while I'm compelled by the OVA's take on “outgrowing” being less about growing up but more about letting go of the past and moving on, it still rather adds to this idea of “outgrowing Senketsu”... which leaves a really sour taste in my mouth. Yeah, it seems to be more about what sailor uniforms represent (and particularly, what a Kamui represents) than anything about Senketsu personally, but the point still stands. He's Ryuko's friend and partner. You don't outgrow that.

I'm really overthinking it, but I still feel like the OVA unnecessarily complicated Senketsu's demise (just like I've unnecessarily complicated this response). I'm all for moving on and not getting controlled by the past, but this idea that maybe Senketsu's actually really inside Ryuko and yet can't be her friend anymore... that stings. And while it does open the possibility of a revival as you said, I get the feeling that that would just go totally against the OVA's message. Ryuko says that she gets what Senketsu was trying to tell her, and that's that she shouldn't mourn over him but get on with her life. Bringing him back goes contrary to that because doing so would also bring back the past.

Worst of all, though, is that the closure at the end here gives off the

impression that Ryuko doesn't *need* Senketsu anymore, which doesn't sit right with me. Cause, like, when you lose a friend and you learn to live without them, saying you don't need them anymore feels all sorts of wrong. People certainly need people, but with friends, it shouldn't be about being so reliant on them that you literally need them to live—it's about *wanting* them in your life because they enhance it by being who they are. So in this sense, yes, Ryuko doesn't need him, but that's not something I want to hear in this show's final moments. I want to hear that they were friends, that they had good times together, that she'll miss him but she won't kill herself in missing him, and she'll never forget him. This, "I've outgrown you and I don't need you anymore" vibe I get just feels like a slap in the face after everything those two went through together.

tl;dr, I actually enjoy episode 24's epilogue better and feel like it makes the revival ideas more feasible than the OVA's. Sure it doesn't have especially nice closure, but it also left a lot more open. Mostly, though, it didn't make it seem like letting a beloved friend live a fuller life was something negative like I get here in the OVA.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on September 4, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/96652233480/you-know-what-really-personal-thing-i-liked-about>

Additional commentary: In a later post, I added, "Nowadays, I think I know what the series is going for, which is that Senketsu is watching over Ryuko from the afterlife kinda like Mufasa from *The Lion King*. This seems to be supported by the English dub script, which changes some of the ending lines a bit. Mako says that Senketsu will always be here—"not *here* here, but in your heart here"—which points to the idea that he's dead but will live on in Ryuko's memories. Still, with a show that loves to blur the line between the metaphorical and literal so much—I mean, Senketsu and Mako both literally *and* metaphorically went into Ryuko's heart to save her from Junketsu in episode 21—I just feel like no matter how much you alter the lines, the source material is simply too ambiguous when it comes to the OVA and Senketsu's final fate."

OVA ENDING

I keep seeing this disturbing trend where a character mourning for the death of a loved one is used as a catalyst to begin a romance with another character.

And I just... I find this so deeply messed up. I think what it shows me most of all is that we're desperately in need of more stories dealing with death and how people handle death, because honestly? I don't know how to handle it myself, and I'm sure most people don't. It's kind of like this taboo topic. It's something you don't talk about, or if you do, it's often heavily romanticized.

So let me just say it straight out: comforting someone after they've lost someone important to them is *not* something that should *ever* be construed as romantic—even if those characters *are* romantically involved! It's incredibly, horribly inappropriate, and disrespectful to the deceased. This comforting shows care and love, yes, but it doesn't belong in a romantic context. It's like saying, "Oh, yes, this person is gone now, very sad, I'm sorry, now let's go make out."







Though I wasn't specifically referring to this moment, this scene from the ending of *Kill la Kill*'s episode 25 OVA was definitely a huge inspiration. And with Valentine's Day a few days ago, I was reminded once more of how it is so commonly interpreted, and it broke my heart. I sat for a long while just wanting to cry, considering and reconsidering making this addendum.

In the end, I do think it's important to say. So...

This is one of the most heart-wrenching scenes from the OVA, and one whose significance I cannot stress enough. No matter Ryuko's claims that she's fine without Senketsu, or that she'll be okay and you shouldn't worry about her, here we see that she's *struggling* with letting him go. Sure, she just screamed a big, rousing speech about moving on, but things are easier said than done. At the end of it all, she can't help but clutch her heart, where Senketsu's eye used to be. She smiles, but it's clear that this isn't something that's *easy* for her.

And why would it be? Senketsu was Ryuko's kindred spirit, someone *just like her* who understood her completely. He was someone she wanted to spend the rest of her life with ("I'm never taking Senketsu off ever again!"), and someone she loved more than words could describe. She would put her life on the line to protect him, and did—over and over again. But right when they'd saved the world together and they should have finally been able to enjoy a peaceful life, she has to watch him die... and she's powerless to stop it.

Here, Ryuko is *finally* showing some vulnerability. Senketsu's loss severely affects her, and notably, this is the first time we see her really reveal this in anyone's company. She's hurting! Regardless of what she says, of what

she *knows*, she's still just lost someone incredibly dear to her, and it still pains her.

And Mako sees that. Mako sees that, and reassures her that Senketsu will always be with her—that to move on, it doesn't mean you have to *let go* of everything you shared. Ryuko then comes to a realization: there's nothing shameful about treasuring the memories she had with Senketsu. It doesn't make her “stuck in the past” to cherish those times. It doesn't make her weak.

So in the very final moments of *Kill la Kill*, Ryuko looks up towards where Senketsu is... and he looks back. She stops running and pushing away her feelings. She acknowledges her pain, but understands that they'll *always* have their important, significant bond, even after death—and it's *that* which the show wants you to remember and take away from it, at the end of everything.

When I look at this scene, that's what I see. But I feel so alone in this viewpoint.

This is a romantic, “into the sunset” moment, and to think of it anyway else is offensive, rude... disgusting, even. And once more, I literally *want to cry*.

I'm a total sap (and drama queen), but hear me out. Senketsu's character arc and development I see as so meaningful. It's about a character who's constantly diminished, belittled, disrespected, hated, and thought of as a monster *finally* gaining a sense of self-worth. He discovers who he is and learns that he *is* important, that he *does* matter. Yes, he's a silly-looking talking shirt, but isn't this a powerful narrative regardless? And doesn't it just really, really *hurt* when there's the sense that it's *for the best* that he dies, after all that? That he doesn't belong in the world he helped save? That, after learning that he's significant and human and *more* than just Life Fibers, he's reduced to nothing more than a sailor uniform to be left behind?

Whenever I see a romantic reading of this moment, that's all I can see. Senketsu *doesn't* matter. Regardless of everything he went through, of his growth and triumphs, of *who he is*, he really *was* just an inanimate object all along—a child's toy to be abandoned and forgotten when you grow up. That, because of the *way he looks*, he's inconsequential, to be pushed aside like nothing. And that *hurts!* Seriously! What do you think that says to people who don't fit in with the norm like Senketsu didn't?

And above all else, the show doesn't seem to be saying that. It ends with Ryuko realizing that she doesn't have to push away her memories of Senketsu to move on, and ends with her looking away from Mako, away

from the *now*, away from her life at the moment so she can appreciate him and the times they shared. It ends with Senketsu's star twinkling—with the understanding that he'll always be there with her.

I don't mean to diminish Ryuko and Mako's relationship, of course. I think it's really crucial that Ryuko shows that vulnerability in front of Mako, and I find it so sweet and heartwarming how Mako comforts her. But there are so, so, *so* many ways to appreciate these two as a cute couple without dismissing or disrespecting Senketsu, and a scene about Ryuko *mourning* and coming to terms with his loss being construed as romantic is something that I feel absolutely does that.

And it makes me so sad every time I see it.

Anonymous asked: "She can't help but clutch where he was" I really don't think that's it at all, I think she's genuinely feeling him, she does the same thing in the epilogue. Whether it's a metaphor or whether he's really there, it doesn't matter; to her he's there, she can feel him. Well, I'll argue with you till the cows come home on Senketsu being really gone.

Hah, well, regardless of Senketsu's final fate, wouldn't you agree that the HOVA's ending scene is about his bond with Ryuko? That's what I was going for. I always feel so incredibly *sad* when I see this moment edited and gified and screencapped without context (or *with* context!), pushing a romantic reading, completely ignoring Senketsu's significance. It breaks my heart.

To quote my tags:

#i'm sorry i'm just... really emotional about this #like #a girl came to the office i work at the other day and she was just having an awful day #and she just started crying right there #and i put my hand over hers as a way of comforting #and i feared right after that it was probably inappropriate of me #(though the girl did thank me afterwards and seemed to feel much better) #and people are saying that it's just... -wrong- to view this kind of comforting as non-romantic? #i think that's so harmful... #and especially in this case... #ryuko's in mourning... #and it hurts me so much to see that forgotten #i mean this is just my opinion of course and i'm open to hearing how i'm wrong but... #i mean it when i say i literally wanted to cry at this being pushed as a cute valentine's day moment #i just can't

see it as anything but like posing for a gooey love card with your lover at the grave of your best friend

Depending on your interpretation of the ending, Ryuko may not exactly be in mourning per se, but she's still thinking about Senketsu and what they shared together. Again, I'm willing to hear how I'm wrong here, and I don't mean to dismiss Ryuko and Mako's relationship (and find it very sweet and important how Mako comforts her!), but it just rubs me the wrong way to look at this sort of scene and find romance in it. It seems so disrespectful (to a character whose arc is *all about* gaining respect for himself and learning he's important), and, once more, it makes me so sad whenever I see it.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 24, 2015, and added to on February 19, 2016.
Extra commentary posted February 21, 2016.

URLs:

<http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/139594010462/marshmallowgoop-i-keep-seeing-this-disturbing>

<http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/139743805780/she-cant-help-but-clutch-were-he-was-i-really>

Additional commentary: Perhaps the saddest thing about it, though, is that when I posted a gifset and a snippet of this essay, there were instances of it being misinterpreted in the exact way that I was arguing *against*.

RYUKO AND SENKETSU

BERSERK FORM

Who's to blame for going berserk and becoming a monster when Nui reveals that she killed Ryuko's father in episode 12? Is it Ryuko's fault, or Senketsu's?

I think a lot of this depends on how you define "fault."

It's clear that Senketsu never wanted the awful berserk incident to happen. He warns Ryuko in a desperate attempt to prevent it, pleads with her to calm down, and Ryuko later describes his pain at the transformation as him crying. But I think it's safe to say that he's not crying solely because it hurts *him*—it's because it hurts Ryuko. He cares for her immensely, and he'd never voluntarily eat her in his right mind, *especially* not at this point in the series when they've grown so close and become such good partners. What happens with the monster form is the last thing *he* wants.

But at the same time, Senketsu chooses to work with Ryuko and fight with her. When he's in pain and says he won't be able to control himself as Ryuko gets angrier and her blood grows hotter, the underlying message is that he *knows* he's dangerous and has the power to bring great harm to anyone who wears him... even his best friend. So even if it is Ryuko's doing that *leads* him to lose his mind, should he be blamed for being with her in the first place? Is it *his* fault that he puts her in danger by being around her whilst knowing that if he loses it, he could very well kill her?

There's a lot of *stuff* in Senketsu's voice when he asks Ryuko if she's afraid of him after the incident. Sure, Ryuko got mad, Ryuko made him cry, Ryuko lost it, but at the end of the day, *he still consumed her*. He couldn't stop it. No matter how much Senketsu loves and cares for Ryuko, no matter how much he wants to protect and help her, he's still made of Life Fibers, and they have the power to hurt whether he wants it or not. Senketsu is pretty calm about finding he's an alien in episode 16, but he's *horrified* at the thought that he's just using Ryuko for food. He doesn't want to be what people are constantly telling him he is, and when he asks Ryuko if even *she's* scared... there's a lot of feeling and heartbreak. After all, Ryuko is the only one who can hear him and his only friend.

With all this in mind, it only makes sense that a lot of the characters seem to blame Senketsu for what happens. Tsumugu never trusted Life Fibers after what happened to his sister, and even though he *does* seem to lighten up a bit after he witnesses Senketsu's loyalty to Ryuko in his debut

episode (5), he still harbors a lot of bad feelings towards Senketsu pretty much right until the end of the show anyway. Satsuki, meanwhile, grew up learning from her father that Life Fibers are evil and what killed her sister, and has to deal with Junketsu in the series proper... which is a pretty terrible experience. In episode 15, she mocks Ryuko's idea that a person can have a symbiotic relationship with Life Fibers, saying that such a thing is a "fairy tale." What happens to Ryuko, then, only makes sense. Ryuko loses her control over the Kamui in her anger, and it consumes her.

And this is all super compelling and I wish it got explored more in the series myself, but it seems the narrative places the blame for the berserk incident pretty firmly on Ryuko. The focus of episode 13 isn't so much about *Senketsu's* guilt over what happened, but Ryuko's. Even though he feels terrible himself and others may blame him, Ryuko doesn't one bit. She's afraid of *herself*, not him—a super crucial point to the series as a whole, because it is moving on from this fear that serves as a *huge* moment of character growth for her. To quote myself (page 33):

What's notable [when Ryuko speaks to Senketsu at the end of episode 13] is what she focuses on. It's not the fact that she wreaked absolute havoc [when she went berserk]. It's not that she could have killed someone. It's not even that she could have killed *herself*. No, what bothers Ryuko most about the whole situation is that she couldn't control herself and *she made Senketsu cry* because she couldn't. She hurt him, and she's terrified of ever hurting him like that again.

This is something that really seems to eat at her, because she brings it up once more in episode 17, where she assures Senketsu:

Ryuko: Don't worry. I won't lose control again. I won't make you shed any more bitter tears."

So when Ryuko crosses paths with Nui for a third time in episode 18 and most certainly *could* lose control, it's pretty stinkin' significant that she doesn't. Nui gleefully taunts her, but through it all, Ryuko remains devoted to her promise. Determined to control herself, she's able to let the anger go, presented visually to the audience with this wonderful shot:



And why is Ryuko able to do this this time around? It's exactly as she says in episode 15:

Ryuko: I'll live for the desire of what's almost in reach regardless of the rage that's almost in reach! The desire to take back my friend! To protect the friends that are precious to me!

She won't give in to rage because that rage only hurts the very friends she's trying to protect. But most significantly? Last time, that rage hurt her friend so terribly that he *cried*. She can control herself so well here because if she doesn't, she knows that could happen again—and that terrifies her.

In the end, maybe both Ryuko and Senketsu are to blame a little for Monster Mode, or maybe just Ryuko, or maybe just Senketsu, but regardless we're left with a situation that highlights how much Ryuko and Senketsu care for one another. They both hate what happened—Ryuko hates it because she hurt Senketsu, and Senketsu hates it because he hurt Ryuko (which is why the *very first thing* he concerns himself with once they're back to normal is her safety). Senketsu acknowledges that the nature of what he is can and will be dangerous to Ryuko if she loses control, but he also trusts her to keep it together. Just as he would never want to hurt her, he knows that she would never want to hurt him. Though it may be dangerous and painful, he voices his desire to stay by her side. It builds them up as better partners, and I'd argue it also sets the stage for what happens with Ryuko's character later on. She's horrified of hurting the people close to her, so what happens when it turns out that she's actually a "Life Fiber Monster" herself?

This is such an ugly situation, but the way that it's really not presented as some black-and-white, easy issue is just so wonderful. It's raw and real, and makes Ryuko and Senketsu's friendship that much stronger. That's why I love the bit of ambiguity about the "blame" here.

Notes and Links

Originally written as a response to argentdandelion's meta on the topic (see 1 below), and posted on September 20, 2015.

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/129553079795/whos-to-blame-for-monster-mode>

1. <http://argentdandelion.tumblr.com/post/129534410011/whos-to-blame-for-monster-mode>

COMMUNICATION

Just to address it, the emphasis placed on Ryuko and Senketsu's *communication* is rather fascinating and ends up working on a couple different levels.

On the one hand, we have this huge, prominent narrative that's all about, "Clothes can't usually talk, but these clothes can, and it's weird and different! Pay attention to this!" It's utilized as a joke (Ryuko's just talking to herself!), and a kinda-tragic comedy (Senketsu cursing God that no one can hear his words in the fourth Drama CD), and sometimes it's even depicted more seriously (the reassurance Senketsu gets later on that people realize he *is* speaking and wish they could understand him), but regardless of how it's played, it's made a big deal. Senketsu can talk—whether people want to believe it or *can* believe it—and this ability of his changes the entire script of the show's universe. Tsumugu outright says in episode 5 that "People and clothing can't communicate. They can't be friends. It's impossible." But Senketsu can, because as we've been reminded time and time again, he's capable of verbal speech. Right?

But—and this is where it gets interesting—communication is far more than verbal speech, and just because you're spouting out words, it doesn't mean you're actually saying anything important or understandable. We're shown over and over that Senketsu can talk, it's made a running gag that he can speak and no one can hear him except Ryuko, but episode 5 is also really good at asking, "Wait, but are they really *communicating* at all?" Senketsu and Ryuko are bickering and arguing right until the end. She's not listening to him, he's not expressing himself clearly through his words, they're constantly at odds, and it's only when *Senketsu jumps out to save Ryuko's life* that she understands what he was trying to get across the entire episode: he cares about her. It's not the fact that he can talk that allows this communication to get through. It's his actions.

Later episodes build on this with a reiterated sentiment of, "We can't understand what you're saying, Senketsu, but we know how you feel." And why? Because the characters see what Senketsu *does*. He wishes they could hear him so badly, but the core of his emotions and feelings are still easily communicated. What we end up with is, yeah, words are cool and all, Senketsu can talk and woah that's strange, but that's not all there is to communication, and you should pay attention to what *isn't* being said, too.

So, Ryuko and Senketsu? They have a friendship that the narrative places a *ton* of emphasis on the point of communication—and not just the verbal stuff. This is important for Senketsu because it's the unspoken that allows others to see that he *is* good and alive and cares about Ryuko, but what I find just as compelling is how this concept relates to Ryuko. She's constantly saying a lot to Senketsu... and not just with her words.

Take episode 13. Ryuko is in a rut because she'd gone berserk after meeting Nui, caused tons of damage and destruction, and hurt Senketsu so badly that he cried. She's in a terrible place. But when Sukuyo comes in to liven her spirits, Ryuko's able to smile, as if to say, Don't worry about me. Sukuyo leaves, the smile drops immediately thereafter, and Ryuko becomes very solemn once more as she turns her full attention to Senketsu, asking if it's safe to wear him after what she'd done.





This is the root of her problem: she's scared of herself. She's upset and feels horrible, which is made clear when Ryuko and Senketsu get their talk at the end of the episode. But with Sukuyo? She can look like she's okay. And when Nagita bursts in right after this early scene? She acts angry, selfish, and irritated, a guise for what's *really* going on. I love what Ryuko and Senketsu say at the episode's end, but what makes it as powerful as it is isn't just that they're communicating through their words. Ryuko is also communicating with how she lets her guard down, and how she shows Senketsu the truth. She's frightened and sad and guilty, which is evident in her tone, body language, *and* dialogue.

This is a recurring element. In episode 17, after a passionate, supposedly-selfless display of loyalty towards Senketsu, Ryuko, in a quiet moment alone with him, shows a rare bit of vulnerability as she drops her head and softens her voice, admitting that maybe she's just scared, and maybe she *doesn't* care about him like she had shown when she defended his life so valorously. Come the start of episode 20, when Ryuko's learned the truth about herself and is not happy about it in the slightest, she keeps hiding her face—likely to hide her tears. She turns away from Mako, averts her eyes. She acts angry—and to an extent she likely is—but beneath it all she's really just horribly, terribly upset. And what does she end up doing? She actively *gets in Senketsu's face* to show him this.





Even when Senketsu's gone, Ryuko has to step away from the people who love her and spend a moment looking up towards where he is, showing him her true feelings.

When people wonder (and *I* wonder, to be honest) why anyone would get so invested in the fictional relationship between a girl and a sailor uniform, so much of it comes from this for me. Ryuko likes to look cocky and self-assured, doesn't want to show "weakness," doesn't want her loved ones to worry, but with Senketsu, she ends up communicating a lot of how she really feels deep down not only through the actual *dialogue* of their many heart-to-hearts, but also through what she's *not* saying. I've never seen a clear answer on what "Ambiguous" is about (and admittedly, the visuals of the opening do point towards the Ryuko and Satsuki interpretation), but the sentiment of, "I thought I could hide the truth behind the smile I wore on the runway/But you always saw through me" fits Ryuko and Senketsu perfectly. There's so much communication happening between them, the

show makes a huge deal of it, but a lot of it is in what's *not* said.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on September 14, 2015.

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/129131944625/just-to-address-it-the-emphasis-placed-on-ryuko>

HOW DID SENKETSU DIE?

Anonymous asked: (1/2) i just finished watching kill la kill and i literally cried SO MUCH. anyway i wanted to ask about a few things: (1) before going back to earth, what did senketsu mean when he said shinra-koketsu was "too" powerful and he looked like he was "loosing threads", (2) why did senketsu burn despite being able to withstand basically everything? couldn't he and ryuko safely return to earth while in their "battle mode"?, (3) who could've shot the scissors blade back to earth for ryuko to use? --

(2/2) and lastly, (4) why did ryuko leave the scissors blade when they left the town? thank you!

I see finale and OVA questions as good topics of conversation, since I think a lot is rather left open. As far as I know, none of these questions have ever been *directly* addressed by either the series or supplementary materials, so my responses probably lean a little more towards the headcanon than anything really all that concrete. Interested in hearing other thoughts about this!

But as for mine: I've always interpreted Senketsu's line about Shinra-Koketsu being too powerful to mean that he couldn't handle all its Life Fibers. Senketsu's spent the whole series absorbing other Life Fibers and growing stronger, but everything has a limit. When he absorbs Shinra-Koketsu—which is by far the most powerful Life Fiber enemy he and Ryuko have ever faced—it's finally too much. His body can't handle it, and he falls apart.

I know it's a popular interpretation that Senketsu dies wholly due to the Earth's atmosphere, sacrificing himself so Ryuko can live. And I mean, I get it—Senketsu absolutely would die for Ryuko's sake, and that's something we've known since as early as episode 5 when he saved her from Tsumugu. It's completely within his characterization to sacrifice himself for Ryuko, and a fitting (if tragic) end to his character arc.

But I've never really seen it that way. He's shown in bad shape before he even reaches the atmosphere, losing threads as mentioned, and also sounding quite weak and frantic.



So I don't really see it myself that he dies because he burns up. He dies because he was already falling apart from being overloaded with too many Life Fibers and wasn't going to make it no matter what he or Ryuko did. I also think this is something he knows pretty much immediately after absorbing Shinra-Koketsu, which explains why he says they don't have much time left—because *he* doesn't, and he knows it. So he's dying and falling apart and can hardly hold himself together and doesn't have the strength to stay synchronized with Ryuko but he uses the last bit of life he has to see it that she gets to Earth safely.

If Ryuko and Senketsu are anything, they're super protective of each other. I see Senketsu's last moments as him doing everything in his power to assure to himself that Ryuko will be okay before his inevitable death as opposed to him deliberately *causing* his own death, and that's also partly because their protectiveness goes both ways. Ryuko would *never* just let Senketsu totally sacrifice himself for her without fighting it. She's the kind of person who'll go the way of "I See Fire" and say, "If this is to end in fire/Then we should all burn together." This is pretty much blatantly stated both times Ryuko defends Senketsu in front of Tsumugu, with her saying both times that if Tsumugu wants to kill Senketsu, he's gonna have to kill her, too. And on top of that, though she yearns and craves for companionship like she gets with Senketsu more than anything, even late into the series it seems she's still afraid if she deserves it, even flat-out saying so in episode 22 when she claims, "I don't know if I deserve [Senketsu and Mako], but I sure as hell ain't gonna let 'em down!" So I could never see her letting Senketsu

die for her so easily. She knows something's wrong before he pushes her back to Earth, and though she tells him not to do anything crazy, she quickly realizes it's too late. He's not gonna make it, he's falling apart, and there's absolutely nothing she can do about it. (Except hold back her tears so it's not her crying that he leaves with.)

As for the OVA questions... it's hard for me to really say what's happening with Senketsu, because I don't particularly know. But I think the show was going for this idea of Senketsu helping Ryuko out from the afterlife, hence his tossing of her Scissors and his "ghost" that you see later in the fight. It's... pretty confusing, though. I've discussed this a lot if you're interested in seeing more about it, on page 139 and page 143.

Finally, from a narrative standpoint, Ryuko leaves the Scissors behind because she's done fighting. The threats are gone, she's ready to move on with her life, and she doesn't need them anymore. I guess you could argue that this isn't exactly the smartest thing to do considering Ragyo's warning that Life Fibers will return one day, but the point of the OVA is all about graduation and moving forward in life. Ryuko can't do that clinging onto her father's Scissor Blades forever, so they sink to symbolize this. (And I mean, if she *really* needed them again, I doubt she'd have much trouble getting a hold of them...)

From a production standpoint, I also see this as Trigger desperately trying to tell fans that there's not going to be any season 2 or a sequel... but that might just be me.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 15, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/124192310310/12-i-just-finished-watching-kill-la-kill-and-i>

Anonymous asked: Heya, i just finished Kill la Kill (im late i know) and why did Senketsu die from flames in the end? In many episodes we can see that Senketsu (Senpaiketsu, get it eheheh) can survive many things like explosions, swords, fire... etc. But why did he die at the end? I know it maybe took very much power to perform Senketsu Kisaragi.. But why? The end of the kinda ruined the anime for me. (i still love it though)

Heya!

Basically: I believe Senketsu dies from absorbing Shinra-Koketsu. He's shown falling apart before he's in flames, and there's the implication that he would have been lost no matter what. In his weakened state, though, fire is able to affect him.

And yeah, I've totally played with the connection between Senketsu's death and this line from *Space Patrol Luluco* before...



...but I don't seriously agree with the whole, "*Kill la Kill* would have ended a lot more quickly if they just threw a match at Ragyo" idea that it seems to be joking about.

I mean, it's funny, and maybe the team is laughing that they never thought about this when making *Kill la Kill*. But you're exactly right—fire didn't really seem to be much of a weakness for Life Fibers at all before:



Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 26, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/144974698190/hey-i-just-finished-kill-la-kill-im-late-i>

HOW MUCH DID SENKETSU'S DEATH MEAN TO RYUKO?

You know, I don't think it gets discussed enough just *how much* losing Senketsu means for Ryuko.

I mean, consider:

- Ryuko has a recurring nightmare in the series that involves Senketsu being chopped to bits¹. You could argue this is foreshadowing his ultimate demise, especially considering that the dream happens in episodes 4 and 14 and the number 4 is a homophone in Japanese for *death*, but it doesn't change the fact that her having these nightmares at all (and waking up frantic and screaming for him each time) signifies that she's absolutely terrified of losing him. Episode 5, after being beaten by Tsumugu, also has Ryuko waking up crying out for Senketsu. Though this doesn't include the same dream sequence, it still points to the same thing—Ryuko is plain horrified at the thought of not having Senketsu in her life anymore.
- Ryuko fits her genre well and is a super *shounen* protagonist all about friendship. She absolutely hates to hurt her friends or for any danger to befall them, and a huge bit of character development for her comes from all the guilt and regret she bears after going berserk in episode 12 when she meets Nui, largely because this hurts Senketsu and makes him cry. Determined not to hurt him again, she's able to keep her temper under control when she meets Nui for a third time in episode 18. Additionally, she blames herself for being weak and unable to draw out Senketsu's power prior to this, which is what leads to Nui chopping him up and Ryuko's quest to put him back together again. In these episodes, her fierce determination to get Senketsu back gives her incredible strength and she describes herself as “not the same old Ryuko anymore” because she's “got [her] sights set on something, and [she's] gonna get it.” Essentially here, Ryuko is fiercely protective and will go all-out to save those important to her, be that from herself or any other force. So, being *unable* to save Senketsu in the finale...?

- On this vein, Ryuko shows both in episode 5 and episode 16 that she'll *die* to protect Senketsu, saying that the only way Tsumugu will get Senketsu is if he kills her first. She values Senketsu and his life a tremendous, tremendous amount.
- Ryuko says in episode 22 that she's "never taking Senketsu off again." She wants to spend the rest of her life with him.
- After Senketsu dies, Ryuko *falls unconscious* because her grief is so great.
- And because I've analyzed this show too much and am 100%-certified weeb trash², I'll also argue that Ryuko was most comfortable with Senketsu and that he knew her better than anyone. Ryuko is quickest to open up to him (cemented by Mako's repeated comment of Senketsu not being her only friend), and the two share multiple heart-to-hearts (episode 13 concerning Ryuko's fear of herself after the berserker incident, episode 15 regarding their friendship, episode 17 about Ryuko's concerns for the future, episode 22 about Satsuki). With episode 22, you could also make the argument that even when Ryuko feels the need to get away from everyone else, she still sticks with Senketsu, as she separates herself from her friends and family eating together and eats alone with him. Regardless of your interpretation, though, he was someone she felt safe with and who "got" her.

Just. His death is a *big deal*.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on February 18, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/111374311060/you-know-i-dont-think-it-gets-discussed-enough>

1. <http://lifefiber.tumblr.com/post/90202444517/episodes-4-vs-14-vs-24-four-pronounced-shi>
2. <http://web.archive.org/web/20150619123822/http://shittywebcomics.tumblr.com/post/97709648274/the-relationship-between-ryuko-and-senketsu>

“I DON’T LIKE RYUKO/SENKETSU BECAUSE SENKETSU’S NOT HUMAN”

I discovered recently that, when it comes to Stuff I Really Like, I have a certain Formula.

It all started when I saw this post on Tumblr. You know the type. “I want a story with x and y and z!” they say, and at the end of it, in all caps, there’s your Perfect Story, the one you’ve been waiting for.

So, I went along with this one, scrolling down the list. Okay, sure, cool, whatever, but then I saw it. *Talking sword*.

I pressed the download button immediately.

(And for the curious, the story in question was Brandon Sanderson’s *Warbreaker*, and though I haven’t gotten terribly far into it yet, I am finding it quite enjoyable thus far. Very nice writing, and the plot’s definitely grabbed my interest. Sanderson himself is offering free downloads¹ on his website if you’d like to join in.)

It only took ‘til I finished the prologue, though, to realize that this... wasn’t exactly the *talking sword* I was hoping for. Sighing to my roommate, I said, “The sword isn’t a *cinnamon roll*.”

And then came the Realization. I have a Formula.

It goes like so:

1. There is a non-human character (who is a Cinnamon Roll™)
2. Who has a meaningful, positive relationship with a human

That’s it. You put that in your story and you’ve hooked me. I could watch this same scenario a million times over and never get bored. I like it *that much*.

But then came the question. *Why?*

In searching for an answer, I find myself turning to the late Diana Wynne Jones. (For those unfamiliar with her, you might recognize her as the author behind the *Howl’s Moving Castle* novel that inspired the Hayao Miyazaki movie of the same name. Also, if you are unfamiliar with her, I would really recommend getting familiar with her.) I turn to her, because perhaps no other author has quite resonated with me as she has when it comes to all matters Writing. And one of these matters, of course, is the issue that plagues fantasy writers everywhere, and the question she was undoubtedly asked time

and time again.

Why fantasy?

After all, fantasy books are not Real Books. They are not gripping or relevant or applicable to our everyday lives. They are silly, frivolities. Immature. *Magical*. You ain't gonna be winning any Great Literature Awards writing *fantasy*.

Well, I think that's hogwash. So did Jones. You might have seen this quote from her before, from her "Why Don't You Write Real Books?" lecture²:

Diana Wynne Jones: Imagination doesn't just mean making things up. It means thinking things through, solving them, or hoping to do so, and being just distant enough to be able to laugh at things that are normally painful. Head teachers would call this escapism, but they would be entirely wrong. I would call fantasy the most serious, and the most useful, branch of writing there is. And this is why I don't, and never would, write Real Books.

In "The Profession of Science Fiction: Answers to Some Questions," Jones elaborates on this idea³:

Diana Wynne Jones: At its simplest, magic can be considered as a metaphor, or as functioning in the same way as metaphor. In *Witch Week*, it begins as precisely that, with the burning of witches standing for the persecution of people who differ from the supposed norm, but I hope it then goes on to be more, because almost every character eventually turns out to be a witch. It should then become a way of saying 'Think this through.' This, it seems to me, is the best *intellectual* function of magic in fantasy. You start out by saying 'What if this or that seemingly impossible thing were so ...' and then following through the logic of it. The fact that it has been put in terms of magic (or impossibility) has distanced the problem (which may actually be one painfully near to most children, like secret fears or racial difference) so that it can be walked around, followed through and, if possible, solved in some way. To use magic by itself as a solution is merest cheating. The problem has to be restated in equivalent magical terms and then linked with the minds and actions of people in such a way that a solution can be worked out in human terms as well. Then, because magic is the matter of myths and folktales, the problem becomes exciting rather than painful or intractable and the

imagination is available to come to grips with the problem.

From this perspective, magic is not inherently meaningless and otherworldly—in fact, magic and fantasy can be used to portray the real problems of Real Books in a completely different way. Perhaps one that is more effective and thought-provoking! I place particular significance on Jones's point of *distance*. When we're very close to an issue, it may be difficult to look at it objectively. It might also hurt to think about. And when you're hurting and hopeless, what good does it do to read a dark, gritty Real Book that's just as hurting and hopeless as you feel?

But when that same problem is thrown into a magical realm, is pushed into a fantasy story... it allows us to interact and observe it in an entirely new way. An exciting way! A way you've never thought of before. A way that, if done well, could allow you to come to terms with it. Even figure out another solution. And there's absolutely nothing useless or frivolous or stupid about that.

Now, because I've rambled quite some time and my thoughts are about the farthest thing from *organized*, you might be wondering: What does this have to do with my whole predicament? How does that odd title at the top that I haven't referenced at all yet fit in, and what of the subject that so much of my *Kill la Kill* blog is actually about? You know: Ryuko and Senketsu. A girl and her sailor uniform. That whole non-human Cinnamon Roll™ and human dynamic that I was talking about. The stuff I can't get enough of. My Formula.

Well, just think about it. In the world of *Kill la Kill*, Senketsu is constantly degraded. He's just a shirt, or, even worse, he's a monster and a parasite who doesn't deserve love and should be killed, kept away from Ryuko forever. Later on, even when people stop demonizing him so much, his autonomy is thrown aside. It doesn't matter that he has free will and his own thoughts and feelings and emotions—he's just a tool. He's dangerous and should just be used for as long as necessary, and then forgotten.

Regarding his relationship with Ryuko, the two are repeatedly mocked for their friendship. Ryuko is seen as lonely and delusional for even talking to him. Both Tsumugu and Satsuki (initially) think that their friendship is impossible, since Senketsu is going to be the end of Ryuko eventually. Ryuko's even embarrassed to be seen with Senketsu at first because of society's standards, all due to what Senketsu is.

Doesn't this remind you of anything?

To put it simply, intended or no, I see Senketsu's narrative—and his narrative with Ryuko—to be much like Jones described. Easily metaphorical—and easily analogous to—very real struggles and problems of today, and particularly, to the struggles and injustices of marginalized people, of those who, as Jones put it, “differ from the supposed norm.” Despite being “human” in every other sense of the word, Senketsu doesn't fit in. He's different, he's ignored, he's demonized, and his relationship with Ryuko seen as “wrong.” Is that really as separate from the real problems as speculative fiction critics would lead you to believe?

When I think of all the works I love that use my Formula, they are often all similar in this sense. Duck of *Princess Tutu* finds herself no good and powerless because she's only a duck. (With a human form, yes, but still always a duck, as a certain Drosselmeyer likes to taunt endlessly.) The Beast of *Beauty and the Beast* fears no one will love him because of what he had been transformed into. Greg's relationship with Rose in *Steven Universe* is mocked by Pearl because Greg's a human and Rose is a Gem and those things can't ever be compatible. My One True Pairing for *Danny Phantom* makes it even worse with a ghost and a ghost hunter... who unbeknownst to her, actually wants to *kill* the kid she's dating. (Alter egos can really cause problems sometimes.) In each case, there's a sense of *I'm no good*, or *We could never work*. All because the people involved are *different*.

In wondering why I love this narrative so much, I've tried to be insightful about my life. Maybe it's this, or that, or maybe it's because of something that happened just once that changed me forever. And, sure. I don't want to deny the value of my experiences. But at the end of the day, I know I'm attracted to these stories because it's so nice to see someone who feels like they don't fit in anywhere find someone who accepts them no matter what anybody else says. That's The Dream. That's Hope. Even in fantasy, that means something—something *anyone* can relate with. Everyone brings their own lives and experiences to the table, though, which could explain why it might resonate more with me than it might with others. (I'm also a complete and total sap, so there's that, too.)

But it's not all black-and-white easy, of course. While the distance created through these fantastical situations can do a lot of good and allow us to see problems in a completely different way, I also don't diminish the significance of Real Books that *do* deal with the actual issues, or the advent of

spec that combines the real issues with the magical.

For instance: one very famous fantastical representation of a real problem can be seen in *X-Men*, which draws comparisons to LGBT struggles; one very overt example⁴ points out the similarities between “coming out as a mutant” and “coming out as LGBT.” And while these narratives of overcoming prejudice and finding people who understand you and you can call your family after feeling so alone absolutely⁵ resonate⁶ with people, it also doesn’t change the fact that having *allegories* just ain’t the same thing as real representation. There are definitely very valid complaints regarding this⁷. (Be warned that this source is... rather rude, however.)

Still, when I see sentiments like the title of this post—that Ryuko and Senketsu can’t possibly *ever* be romantic merely because Senketsu is not 100% human—I feel such a powerful story was missed. No, Senketsu may not look human, but that doesn’t stop him from being “human” where it truly counts. He is a person who realizes that he matters and has always mattered by the end of his story. How troubling how quickly this is taken away! He’s just a shirt, so he doesn’t deserve romantic love should he want it (and if you count his episode 11 preview⁸ as canon to his character, he *does* indeed show at least an interest in it)—he doesn’t even deserve to live!

I mean. *Ouch*.

Of course, with Ryuko and Senketsu, it’s ridiculous, to think of them being together romantically. I won’t ever deny that it’s nonsensical, and silly, and in all honesty, even *I* don’t think of them romantically when we’re just referring to canon. But when the possibility is sneered at solely because Senketsu isn’t human? When Senketsu’s entire character arc is glossed over and forgotten, dismissed as too outlandish, too otherworldly, too *magical* and childish? It misses a lot. As Jones put it, *imagining* is “being just distant enough to be able to laugh at things that are normally painful.” A normal human teenager going through what Senketsu does would be a tearfest. Constantly being demonized and hated and ignored. Hardly feeling like you matter, or that you’re any good, or that you belong. That’s awful. Heartbreaking. But in *Kill la Kill*, it’s fantastical. It’s weird. It hurts, but it also makes you smile, too. It’s compelling, and it’s powerful, even with all the ridiculous, with all the silly. It makes you look at things differently. Makes you wonder.

And when all that is tossed aside, when Senketsu is reduced to nothing more than a sailor uniform that you can’t believe you’re crying over... so

much is lost.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 29, 2015... as a maybe not-so-subtle response to the assertion that liking Ryuko and Senketsu romantically is akin to liking Ginny and the Sorting Hat romantically

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125399935680/i-dont-like-ryukosenketsu-because-senketsus-not>

1. <http://brandonsanderson.com/books/warbreaker/warbreaker/warbreaker-rights-and-downloads/>
2. <http://ballerinaduck.tumblr.com/post/55270208540/imagination-doesnt-just-mean-making-things-up-it>
3. <http://www.leemac.freeseve.co.uk/questions.htm>
4. <http://sapphia.tumblr.com/post/105952353948/mcgarrygirl78-ceallaig1-human-cartography>
5. <http://theoceanistoblame.tumblr.com/post/48706229324/why-queer-kids-need-x-men>
6. <http://comicsalliance.com/mutant-proud-xmen-lgbt-rights-family-community-identity/>
7. <http://mermaidsandmistletoe-archive.tumblr.com/post/63469583458/zombiesette-ninshinobi-fuckoffcishets>

INNUENDO

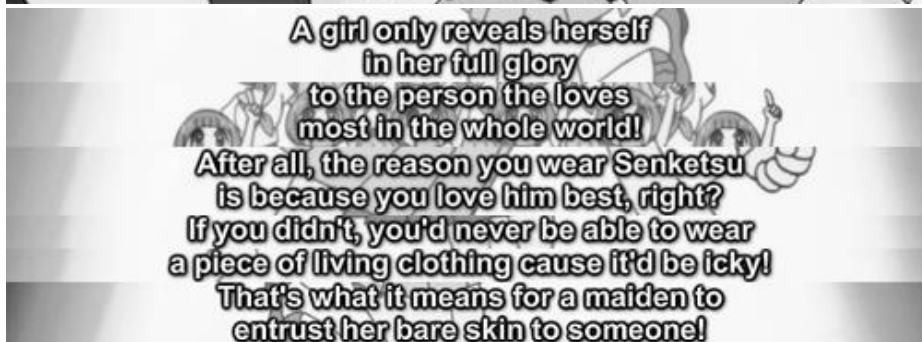
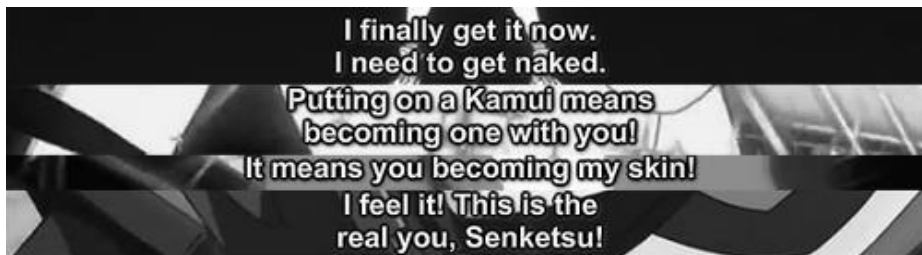
argentdandelion asked: Have you ever seen the CollegeHumor video "The Problem with Jeggings Continue"? One of the gags is somewhat similar to "putting on a kamui means becoming one with you", if more...direct. You may find it funny to make comparisons.

So I admit this isn't something I ever really thought about before falling in love with *Kill la Kill*, but the concept of "wearing" someone being utilized in a romantic or sexual fashion is actually... not that unfounded.

SNSD's song "Back Hug" takes a sugary-sweet approach to the idea. Like clothes, the singer expresses that a certain someone is comfortable to be around, and that she wants to "wear" them and be with them all the time. Ruben Studdard takes a flirtier, more sensual angle in his song "Wear Me," with a chorus that includes, "Girl take me home and/Take it off just to put me on," and verses about, well, being clothes pressed up against a woman's body. Boom! Bap! Pow!s "Suit" takes a creepier view, repeating the lines, "You're so cute I wanna wear you like a suit/I think you'd look pretty good on me," with additional lines of "you got the stuff to get me hot" and "I want to drape you across my shoulders/want you close to the bone." Moving away from music, I remember people making *Kill la Kill* jokes regarding a certain erotica novella called "He Became Her Dress," which, uh, seems to be exactly what it says on the tin.

Of course, having living clothes and wearing them doesn't mean you're automatically gonna go for *this* sort of vibe. As any narrative element, it all depends on how it's played, and in this case, maybe you just want a goofy and heartwarming story about it! Take *Gutsy Frog*. It's a manga/anime series about a boy who crushes a frog whose spirit then lives on in his shirt. I haven't read or watched it myself, but I'm going to hazard a guess that it doesn't even touch on what I just described in the paragraph above (thank goodness). It's also worth it to note that *Kill la Kill*'s idea of talking clothing is likely at least somewhat inspired by it with how many homages the show has to older works and how *Gutsy Frog* seems to be one of director Hiroyuki Imaishi's greatest influences; if nothing else, though, one of Sushio's drawings¹ posted on his Twitter shows that at least *he's* a fan, as it features Senketsu and Guts on Ryuko and Mako's respective shirts communicating to them in a manner that is pretty obviously a shout-out.

In any case, *Kill la Kill* could have gone the same way. But it doesn't. Oh, goodness. It really, really *doesn't*. The show (and OST) love to play up the innuendo:





Suck your blood

窪野弘之

You wear me
But I need your blood first
You must let me suck your blood
Let me lick the power from your blood
Come on, beautiful baby!
Let me suck it!
Come on, smack it up!
Let me suck it then I can have power
Then I can give you power
Come on, jump it up and take it now
I need it now, give me blood
You're so hot, good looking

Even the voice actors joke about it. Ryoka Yuzuki, Satsuki's Japanese voice actress, commented at the Anime Expo 2014 panel² that Satsuki wearing Senketsu in episodes 20/21 was like she had "won over someone else's boyfriend." Toshihiko Seki, Senketsu's Japanese voice actor, noted in the *Febri* Volume 21³ interview that Ryuko and Senketsu can be viewed rather

as a married couple. David Vincent, Senketsu's English voice actor, made a gag in the blooper reel⁴ comparing Senketsu seeing Ryuko wearing Junketsu as being like seeing a lover with someone else. ("That whore! I'm taking my iron and leaving!")

Kill la Kill, of course, is crude and raunchy as all hell. Maybe it's only expected that they would have a field day with this sort of thing, and given the nature of the series, you're not really supposed to take it seriously. Regardless, though, *it's still very much there*. People ask why I would ship a girl and her shirt? Well.

The show is totally teasing it.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on September 23, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/129702841435/have-you-ever-seen-the-collegehumor-video-the>

Additional commentary: In a later post, I added:

Kill la Kill could have easily gone the *Gutsy Frog* (or *Final Fantasy VIII*) route and made it very clearly not "like that." But they make jokes about it. They have dialogue rife with suggestive implications. They have a *whole song* that takes it all up to eleven.

Of course, as stated above, I argue it's not really supposed to be taken "that way," but you could have easily avoided all this and they *don't*. This stuff exists, and a big point I was making with my post [page 192] was that it's *really* uncomfortable to me *personally* to completely ignore this and suggest that Senketsu is Ryuko's father.

But to take this a little further, this whole subject brings me back to my whole struggle with how to really express how I feel about the direction of Senketsu's character. Because when you think about it, they could have made the little jokes and innuendo *so bad*. Senketsu could have been so incredibly awful to Ryuko. Being worn by her nearly all the time, we could have had scene after scene of him groping or otherwise harassing her. We could have had to endure long, nasty monologues where he's just completely objectifying her.

But we don't. On the whole, Senketsu is completely respectful and loving of Ryuko the whole way through, and when we *do* get these

little moments in the show, they're just... so *sweet*? They love being together! There's none of the usual, awful, "haha, a boob got touched and she's flustered about it" sort of situations, but rather, "I'm really glad to be with you and I feel comfortable trusting you." And this is just... so, so, so *great*.

And once more, I can't help but feel that if Senketsu *were* exactly as I just described—rude and nasty and cruel to Ryuko—no one would have these parental readings for him. It'd be romantic and cute and funny.

And that makes me so sad.

1. https://twitter.com/sushio_/status/645691346972311552
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R8x5k-BheE&feature=youtu.be&t=38m32s>
3. <https://twitter.com/maxtrials/status/450301743226568704>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Fd4UFoODdo&feature=youtu.be&t=6m1s>

IS RYUKO IMMORTAL?

the-shipping-trash asked: I've been wondering this for a while, is Ryuko immortal? Because of the life fibers in her body. What do you think?

Also a question I think about!

Immortality is a bit of a tricky thing to talk about because there are so many different variations on the concept. Yeah, it's supposed to be about eternal life and being unable to die, but people like to complicate things and now that definition can include a lot of stuff.

So, looking to TV Tropes¹ for some help here, that site outlines about six main “types” of immortality, all of which are capable of meshing together: Complete Immortality, Retroactive Immortality, Spare Bodies, Biological Immortality, Force of Will, and Incomplete Immortality.

For Ryuko, we can cross out at least Force of Will right off the bat. Force of Will involves a character who can't die until they reach a certain goal, which clearly doesn't fit Ryuko's situation at all. I'd also eliminate Spare Bodies, which involves stuff like body surfing or uploading a consciousness to another form. From what's given in the show, those sort of situations don't really fit.

I think it's safe to say that Complete Immortality also doesn't apply. This type of immortality is defined as: “A character simply *can't* die, ever.” They don't age, and no injuries or sickness will be able to kill them. In Ryuko's case, at least that second part doesn't seem to ring true. Episode 21 talks of the possibility of her dying if she were to rip off Junketsu, episode 23 has Ragyo thinking that she'd killed Ryuko after slicing her in half, and, of course, Ragyo, being Life Fiber-infused just like Ryuko, is able to kill herself in the finale. Ryuko even says herself in episode 20 that she'll be forced to live with Life Fibers in her until the day she dies. So, it definitely seems like Ryuko is capable of experiencing death, under certain circumstances.

Where the immortality question gets sticky in regards to Ryuko is the issue of *aging*. Ragyo is said in episode 16 to have made contact with the Original Life Fiber 20 years ago (presumably becoming Life Fiber-infused in the process), and episode 18 gives us a glimpse of what she looked like around that time:



Compared to how she looks in the present time, can it be said that she's aged in the last 20 or so years?



Personally, I think *yes*, though I admit that it's hard to tell. And even if she has hardly aged, could it perhaps be unrelated to Life Fibers at all?

So this is where we get the big *maybes*. While Ryuko's obviously matured from a baby to a 17-year-old girl, it could definitely be said that she only ages until she reaches maturity, and then she stops, thereby fitting part of the criteria of having Biological Immortality, which is when a character doesn't grow old and doesn't experience the problems that come with growing old.

If Ryuko does have a sort of Biological Immortality and can't age, this only makes the "bittersweet" ending even more so. Prior to the finale, it was

commented that the series' first ending sequence related to the ending of the show as a whole², and you definitely see this in the date montage (which even uses the same song). In the ending sequence, Ryuko is alone, surrounded by mannequins. She goes shopping alone, eats ice cream alone, and at the end of it, she looks out in this mass of mannequins and frowns at the "camera." In the date montage, Ryuko goes shopping with Satsuki and Mako, eats ice cream with them, and at the end of it, she looks out in a mass of grayed-out people and smiles at the "camera."

The way the two relate to each other was said to be the fact that *Ryuko is alone* in both. Sure, in episode 24 she has Satsuki and Mako who love her, but she doesn't have Senketsu, the only one just like her (who she actually liked). If we add in this idea of her being unable to age? It just emphasizes this *aloneness* even more. Everyone else will grow old and die, but she'll be young forever, without anyone by her side who shares the same fate. Terrifying and sad, but definitely a possible reading of the show.

Another possibility could be that she *does* age, but she won't ever die except for extreme circumstances that sever her Life Fibers completely, thus making her fall somewhat under the Age Without Youth³ section of Incomplete Immortality, where you can live forever... but you look *exactly* your age. Which is also a pretty awful fate for her.

The last type of immortality that I haven't really discussed is Retroactive Immortality, which is probably the most accurate way of describing Ryuko's situation. Retroactive Immortality is defined as: "A character *can* die, but won't *stay* dead." With rumors of Nui's silhouette getting teased at AX in regards to the OVA, I wouldn't eliminate the possibility of Life Fiber-infused beings like Nui, Ryuko, Ragyo and Senketsu being able to be "reborn" somehow.

At the very least, though, the main element of the Life Fiber infusion is something along the lines of From a Single Cell⁴ in that they keep regenerating even when they receive mortal injuries. So, is Ryuko immortal? In a sense, *yes*. She even describes herself as "unkillable," and when Uzu sees that Nui can regenerate just like Ryuko can, he comments that Nui is "immortal [like Ryuko]." Can Ryuko age or be reborn? It's up for interpretation! Personally, I'm gonna lean towards *yes* for the aging and *no* for the rebirth, since I do think Ragyo's aged and there isn't much meat for a reborn theory as of yet, but I definitely do see the possibilities for a more tragic reading of the show that has her forever unaging (or even worse—

forever *aging*!)

Maybe the OVA or extra materials will provide more information on the issue, but for now I ultimately think it's just left up to your own interpretation.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 2, 2014 (before the OVA had been released, and the Nui-coming-back tease turned out to be nothing)

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/93642007115/ive-been-wondering-this-for-a-while-is-ryuko>

1. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Immortality>
2. <http://sushiobunny.tumblr.com/post/75208533897/oh-yeah-another-thing-that-i-didnt-think-much>
3. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/AgeWithoutYouth>
4. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FromASingleCell>

IS SENKETSU'S DEATH "FOR THE BEST"?

As much as it killed me to see Senketsu burn up, I think it was for the best. Now that the life fibers are dealt with, Senketsu didn't really have a place. It wasn't like Ryuko was going to wear him for the rest of her life. Like Senketsu said, uniforms are meant to be grown out of.

Old confession is old, but...

To be honest, this is the main reason why I think *Kill la Kill* would have really benefited from some additional editing. Apparently the show was Production Hell and Imaishi says he doesn't want to do another anime for a while because this one was exhausting¹, so I am sympathetic that (imo) the ending didn't turn out especially nicely. But still, I'll always be rather sad that the series seems to trip all over its own themes and messages with Senketsu's death and aftermath and that this is so easily accepted by fans.

I've already written way too much about this (page 139), so to avoid sounding like a broken record, I'm just gonna extend the conversation a bit.

First off, the idea that Life Fibers don't have a place anymore so Senketsu dies would work... if they didn't keep Ryuko alive. The whole finale is about the two of them recognizing that they are one and the same, that they are both human *and* clothing, and to kill Senketsu for having Life Fibers but not Ryuko is then horribly hypocritical.

And sad as it would be, I'd actually prefer it if they'd both died. This would fit the theme of fate that the show's got going on—Ryuko and Senketsu were pretty much created to be together and save the world by ridding it of Life Fibers, and that could very well mean ridding it of the two of them as well. It wouldn't be fair and it'd be awful and cruel, but that's kinda the way that fate tends to be.

Doing this would also allow further analysis on Soichiro's/Isshin's character. Maybe he had good intentions, and maybe it was what he *had* to do to save the planet, but what he did to his daughters is still awful. Dying in the last episode, Ryuko and Senketsu could think on this (rather than pretty much glorifying him and saying that "he'd be satisfied") and you could have a very poignant message that'd fit a lot more with the rest of the series.

Secondly, why couldn't Ryuko wear him for the rest of her life? That's what she wants (as stated explicitly in episode 22 when she says that she's

“never taking Senketsu off again”). Not to mention, this show’s completely and totally ridiculous. It wouldn’t be too off the mark to show Senketsu being able to transform into any outfit Ryuko desires (considering he does have that sort of ability), or hell, even a human form like a lot of fandom seems to want. (Tbh, when I first watched the raw stream of the finale, I was actually kinda expecting a cheesy, Disney-esque ending like that where Ryuko looks out sadly and there he is.) In any case, Senketsu’s character arc is all about recognizing that he’s not a monster, that he has worth, that he’s not *just* clothing but also someone with very real, very human emotions. Giving him a human form would fit well enough with that, especially considering that he doesn’t particularly enjoy having been born a sailor uniform².

And even if Ryuko can’t wear Senketsu always, what’s stopping him from being her friend always? Maybe it’s silly to think about hanging out with a hopping sailor uniform, but again, this show is silly; something like that fits right in. You might outgrow sailor uniforms (though I’ll point out that this sentiment is pretty broken, considering Ryuko still has a year of high school left and no, she’s not done wearing sailor uniforms just yet), but you don’t outgrow friends. I think if say, Mako had died instead of Senketsu and she said essentially the same thing, like, “Don’t cry, Ryuko. People like me are meant to be outgrown,” there wouldn’t be any confessions like this—and especially not ones as popular and agreed upon.

But because Senketsu is a sailor uniform—even though so much of the show *and especially the finale* are all about how he’s *so much more than that*—it gets justified. And hey, I can even justify it a bit myself; Senketsu doesn’t want Ryuko to cry, etc, etc. But it’s all still pretty sad to me.

I know the show’s fantasy and that it’s totally over-the-top and nonsensical, but Senketsu’s story still resonates with a lot of people. And why wouldn’t it? Here’s a character who is sweet and loyal and kind no matter how much he’s told that he’s a monster or a parasite and how much he fears that’s all he is himself. Here’s someone who rises above the prejudice and finds a sense of self-worth. This is a great, compelling narrative with many real-life equivalents! And to backtrack that and say, “Nope, you were just a sailor uniform all along lol this is for the best”... eesh.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on January 29, 2015, as a response to an anonymous confession

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/109482560795/klk-confessions-as-much-as-it-killed-me-to-see>

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/109042080430/connichi-kill-la-kill-panel>
2. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/94519273240/senketsu-heavy-you-are-heavy-ryuko-i-told-you>

IS SENKETSU INTERESTED IN ROMANCE?

Senketsu: I thought about who amongst the female students at Honnouji Academy is my type. Ryuko Matoi. Satsuki Kiryuin. Mako Mankanshoku. Nonon Jakuzure. They're all very peculiar... too peculiar! Next time, a peculiar girl more peculiar than the rest will appear! Her name is Nui Harime! What is up with using her own name as an eyepatch? What? You say you don't want a mere uniform like me to talk about a favorite girl type?! Don't butt into my business, just leave me alone! Next time on *Kill la Kill*, "I'm Not Your Cute Woman"!

Senketsu's episode previews are really charming. I think this¹ is my favorite one for a few reasons:

1. If you take these as canon to Senketsu's character, this means that, canonically, Senketsu is interested in (at least) women—and has put thought into what he's looking for in a partner.
2. You really gotta question why in the world Senketsu's even thinking about "favorite girl type" in the first place. Doesn't he have other things on his mind? And where did he even learn about something like that? I mean, this is someone with absolutely zero life experience. What were you *really* studying in the library in Drama CD 12, Senketsu? (Okay I know he forgot it all in the end (which always struck me as *super tragic* oh my gosh why was that played for comedy) but still.)
3. A bunch³ of his⁴ previews⁵ make references to love and romance and that sort of thing, but this is the only one that really takes the concepts and applies them to himself. That interest and this contemplation you see here of how it relates to him leads me to infer that Senketsu's something of a hopeless romantic. And that's both... really adorable and really sad, considering how his story ends...

Notes and Links

Originally posted on March 11, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/113342168140/senketsus-episode-previews-are-really-charming-i>

Additional commentary: While platonic relationships and aromantic headcanons are wonderful, it's rather frustrating that, when a character *looks* a certain way, cries of, "It must be platonic!" or "They must be aromantic!" are so common simply because imagining said character in a romance makes people too uncomfortable.

Don't get me wrong. I believe Ryuko and Senketsu are canonly platonic, and am completely cool with aromantic headcanons for Senketsu. But when you say, "Well, Senketsu isn't humanoid, so he *must* be uninterested in romance," it leaves a very sour taste in my mouth. If you take this preview as canon to his character, he *is* interested in it, and there are *so, so, so* many good reasons to headcanon a character as aromantic, but "not being a hot humanoid" is *not* one of them.

Because, really. Would anyone be so disturbed with pairing off Ryuko with Senketsu or push that he *must* be aromantic so hard if he were an attractive, human-like alien instead?

Tags added on July 28, 2015: #sorry for the self-reblog but... #while i'm on the subject of senketsu's episode previews #i think this is worth bringing up again #from these you could say that (arguably) senketsu is interested in romance and having one #i bring this up because so often i see this sentiment that a non-human character by definition is aromantic and asexual #and i mean #yeah! #that could absolutely be the case #and i'd love to see this explored further in fiction #especially because i personally identify as asexual #but at the same time #i don't think it's fair to say that because someone is non-human #they just CAN'T have any interest in romance or sex whatsoever #or that it'd be plain ridiculous for them to #part of the appeal of these characters is that they're 'human' not in the literal sense #so just like anybody there is a wide range of possibilities here! #and you could go even further #cause they're #you know #not human #but in any case just as there's nothing wrong with being aromantic and asexual #there's nothing wrong with being romantic and sexual #or romantic and asexual #and so on #and i think it's compelling and important to explore all sorts of possibilities with non-human characters #just as anybody! #so don't get me wrong i'm totally for aro/ace headcanons for senketsu #i mean this blog is more

friendship-focused than anything and you won't find any sexual content here #but i think it's just as valid and interesting to explore other avenues for him as well

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIbXZAdNGPo>
2. https://www.reddit.com/r/KillLaKill/comments/21b3i5/drama_cd_vol_1_translationsummary/
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TcCimFh1dc>
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WJ_am8nU9w
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBh6rAGggeI>

IS SENKETSU ISSHIN?

senketsu is basically her dad in a set of clothes.

so yeah, she doesn't fuck her dad in the show. no fucking shit, weeb trash.

it's still her dad, it's still incest.

I've never seen such open acceptance of father/daughter incest until the kfk fandom.

is senketsu

is senketsu alive

is senketsu really dead

is senketsu dead

senketsu is isshin

Press Enter to search.

So, let's talk about this.

Of course, this isn't anywhere near a new discussion point for me. I have a whole section¹ on my *Kill la Kill* blog dedicated to this topic, but considering that this is such a prominent reading and I find the implications important to talk about, I thought it worthwhile to put together a more in-depth, full analysis.

As a disclaimer, I don't expect everyone to agree with me! If these comments I've received are anything to go by, I know these are likely unpopular opinions, and stress that they are merely my own views. I am, however, very interested in hearing more from other perspectives, because I do sincerely wish to understand these views better.

All that said, let's dig in.

The Appearance Point

Correct me if I'm wrong, but this is probably the most common reasoning behind the idea that Senketsu is Isshin reborn, holds Isshin's spirit, or is otherwise Ryuko's father figure. I'm sure most fans have seen images comparing Senketsu's design to Isshin's, pointing out that both share an eyepatch over the same eye, and that Senketsu's tie resembles Isshin's mustache.

However, machinedeep once summed up these comparisons much more eloquently than I could², arguing that the idea of Senketsu's tie symbolizing a mustache is a little absurd, since it is simply the way sailor uniforms are designed. No one would go around pushing a reading of

Junketsu or Mako's sailor uniform being Isshin for mustache-like ties.

More importantly, though, Senketsu's ties are used for emotive purposes at the *top* of his body when he's more anthropomorphized, which points to them being more akin to eyebrows than a mustache. Comparison images never use this part of Senketsu's design (or his synchronized form, for that matter) for exactly this reason. The idea of Senketsu looking like Isshin for sharing a mustache falls apart when that mustache doesn't really look so much like a mustache in most of Senketsu's forms.

Following this line of thinking, this means that likely the only comparison of any weight here is the eyepatch, and it's crucial to note that this is a comparison *never* pointed out by any of the characters or the show's staff. In fact, the eyepatch has been directly stated³ to be a reference to *Diebuster*, and the purpose of it is that Senketsu is incomplete, with room to grow and evolve. If anything, this paints Senketsu as a character far removed from a father figure, which implies wisdom and experience.

Thematically

One of the strongest arguments for this reading comes from Senketsu's death, with his dialogue basically boiling down to how he can't hold Ryuko's hand anymore, and that she must learn to take care of herself and be on her own. This is pretty much the standard mentor/father figure death that we see all over the place in coming-of-age narratives. Yet, I take a different view, for two main reasons: Ryuko's character arc is the exact *opposite* of needing to learn to take care of herself and be on her own, and she and Senketsu are on the same level rather than Senketsu being somehow above her.

To elaborate on this, Ryuko has been taking care of herself ever since her father abandoned her when she can't have been more than five. Her development is not about gaining independence, but instead about *letting people in*, and letting them take care of her. With Senketsu particularly, it's a major plot point where she opens herself up to him and works *with* him rather than pushing him away, something explicitly noted in the dialogue when she says, upon their first true synchronization:

Ryuko: I didn't know I was doing it, but I was rejecting you [Senketsu] out of embarrassment. That's why you were drinking so much blood! And the more I pulled away, the more blood you needed to get closer! That's why it's working now, right?

In other words, Ryuko knows how to be on her own. What the series does is show that she doesn't have to be, and that she is more powerful with friendship. (It's very *shounen*.)

More majorly, however, Mako describes Senketsu and Ryuko as equals ("As a matter of fact, neither one of them is the boss of the other! They're the best match of people and clothes ever!") and soulmates in her "Hallelujah" sequences. Regardless of whether or not you take these seriously, though, this idea is reflected in many other aspects of the narrative. Ryuko herself describes her relationship with Senketsu as being "two in one" in episode 15, Aikuro notes that they are "true partners" in episode 6, and it's explained in the latter half of the series that they were literally made for each other. These are not the kinds of descriptions and situations I see as fitting for a teacher and his pupil or a father and his daughter, and indeed, whenever their relationship is viewed positively, it is always seen as one between partners and friends.

It's also very worth mentioning that a huge part of the finale is Ryuko and Senketsu's mutual understanding that they are the *same*, both simultaneously being and not being "human and clothing"; for Senketsu himself, it's a large part of his character arc to realize this, and a realization that allows him to break through Absolute Submission in the finale and save the day. It's an incredibly crucial, reiterated point that these two are equals and the same—a point that does not work well with a father figure or mentor reading, as this indicates an uneven power dynamic.

Of course, I cannot say for certain what was truly intended with Senketsu's death. However, I do argue that the sentiment of Ryuko needing to "outgrow her sailor uniform" is hugely contradictory to the major themes and messages evident throughout the entire rest of the series—mainly, in that Senketsu is *more* than a sailor uniform and Ryuko's equal, and that Ryuko is already well aware of how to take care of herself. It is for this reason that I much prefer the English dub of the scene, where Senketsu instead says that Ryuko "cannot wear a sailor uniform forever," minimizing his significance to her as he is very used to doing so she will not cry. Which leads me to my next point...

The Nature of Senketsu's Character

Though I might argue that Ryuko shows signs of having had to grow up too quickly—notably, her comment in the second Drama CD where she says

she forgets sometimes that she *isn't* an adult, but a high schooler—she still undergoes character development that may be defined as “growing up,” and there *is* certainly an immaturity in pushing people away and refusing help just as there is in the inability to be on your own. However, she is not undergoing this kind of development alone. Senketsu is with her every step of the way.

And honestly, this is one of the most compelling aspects of Senketsu's character. He acts like such a know-it-all, he constantly tries to coach Ryuko, he thinks he knows what's best about everything, and yet... he's just as clueless as she is—maybe even *more* so. He has no life experience, no memories, and no idea who or what he is. He even admits himself that he's immature in the long preview for episode 13⁴, where he points out the immaturity of other members of the cast, only to say, at the end, that even *he* is the same.

In other words? *Senketsu isn't wise*. Not in the slightest! He doesn't understand the world at all when he wakes up, and starts the series not knowing well how to communicate and bad at expressing his own emotions (hence his blunt and dispassionate comments), which helps explain why it takes Ryuko five whole episodes to really *get* that he cares about her. When you add in the fact that he's also searching for himself like Ryuko is, it's no wonder that there's an instant bond between them—the kind that makes the very closed-off, keeps-to-herself Ryuko drop her guard in front of him almost immediately.

But not only that, it also adds even more to their status as equals: they *both* don't know what's going on, or who they are. The reason the final battle's “power of friendship” works as well as it does is because it's *both* Ryuko and Senketsu coming to terms with their identities—a *shared* growth, and *shared* power. Had Senketsu been Ryuko's wise mentor instead, this sort of conclusion simply could not have happened.

I often see Senketsu's relationship with Ryuko compared to Satsuki's relationship with Soroi, but I personally find such a comparison unfitting because of this very reason. Senketsu doesn't have the life experience of Soroi—in fact, he has no life experience at all! He's not wise, he wasn't there taking care of Ryuko when she was a child, and unlike Soroi—who is a stable character who does not undergo much change—Senketsu undergoes *great* change, and does so *with* Ryuko, as her equal.

This is one of the biggest points as to why I feel I can never quite get behind viewing Senketsu as a mentor figure or father to Ryuko. These kinds

of characters—from Soroi, to Hagrid, to Alfred, to Iroh—are firm and unwavering, often static, and unchanging. And this isn't a bad thing! They are the anchor to keep their children from going off-course, and are generally wonderfully loveable characters. But this isn't Senketsu one bit. He changes a *lot*, and this is emphasized visually by his gaining of his missing eye in the finale. He begins the series as a blunt, dispassionate robot, comes into the middle being overwhelmed by these *emotions* he's experiencing all for the first time, and ends the show knowing who he is, where he belongs, and why he matters, things he had been questioning all along... very much like a teenager, and very much like Ryuko.

Of course, this is all definitely a simplification, and there are certainly a plethora of examples of father figures and mentors who *don't* fit what I've just outlined. But let me put it this way: these sorts of characters are older, wiser, and raise children. Senketsu does not fit this at all. He is not older than Ryuko—he's physically perhaps a *year* at best by the end of the series, and as such, has no real “wisdom” to speak of. He does not raise her. And while he may teach and guide her, she does the same for him, which is why he's able to grow so much himself. It's a really very mutual thing, and this is a huge, crucial piece of the finale.

Why Does All This Matter?

It's been something that I've found hard to really express in words, but in so many ways, I am so *thankful* for the direction Senketsu's character went. It would have been so *easy* to make him a rude, nasty character who constantly abuses Ryuko for laughs, and whose behavior is never called out. So when I saw early concept art⁵ featuring Ryuko and Senketsu conversing, I was... a little taken aback and disgusted that he was making a crude comment about Ryuko's breasts still not being large. As I noted in my tags:

#i am so so so so glad he isn't like that in the actual series #he's being like the stereotypical 'rude boy' in a shoujo anime holy moly

But here's the interesting part: *the stereotypical “rude boy” in a shoujo anime*. As in, as demonstrated in Blue Angel's *shoujo* anime parody video, “Anime! The Abridged Series Ep. 01 – Girly Girly Romance,”⁶ the one who usually hooks up with the girl in the end. His “rudeness” is somehow *romantic*. I hate to think it, but I can't help but feel that if Senketsu *had* been like this, no one would be saying that he's a father figure

one bit, because the reasons for *why* he's seen this way are often because he's protective, respectful, and caring.

So I ask: Why are these qualities unique to a parent? Why is it *romantic* to be genuinely rude and cruel?

Viewing Senketsu as a father figure for Ryuko does genuinely disturb me in a sense. It's a hugely uncomfortable reading when you really think about the whole situation—perhaps summed up most simply with how they literally *become one* constantly—but more importantly, it also subtly implies to me that someone being protective, respectful, and caring *must* be a parental figure rather than a friend or lover.

And that's *scary*.

In Short

- Ryuko and Senketsu are equals. This is a huge point of the series.
- Ryuko never seems to consider Senketsu her dad, but a friend on the same level as Mako. Amusingly, in the English dub, she calls *Gamagori* “Dad.”
- Senketsu admits that he is immature. He is also younger than Ryuko, and has literally no life experience to teach or guide her with.
- The eyepatch has never once been said to be because Senketsu is supposed to represent or be Ryuko's father. It is a callback to *Diebuster* and it's there to point out that Senketsu is still growing, which is why he *gains* this eye in the finale.
- This reading is *incredibly* uncomfortable when you factor in all the innuendo. Ryuko and Senketsu constantly become one with each other's bodies, Ryuko makes a joke about him not “cheating” on her when Maiko wears him, Mako says Ryuko *loves him the most!* and clearly means it *like that* because of the focus on nudity that would be super inappropriate in any other situation, Ryuko says that she's going to make Senketsu “jealous” as he's dying by getting together with stuff that's not him, there's the hugely flirtatious official song “Suck your blood” clearly from Senketsu's perspective that includes lines such as, “You're so hot, good looking,” there's an official card

featuring Ryuko in a bikini called “Senketsu’s Date with Ryuko”⁷... and serious or not, all of this is *bugely, bugely* squicky if thought of as between a father and a daughter. Add in the fact that Ryuko and Senketsu’s relationship is pretty much always viewed in a positive light, and it seems very unlikely that being *creepy* is the intended effect here.

- This interpretation implies to me that only *parents* can be protective and respectful and loving rather than friends or lovers, and this strikes me as... really distressing.

What do you think?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on January 18, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/137545387225/is-senketsu-isshin>

Additional commentary: This post continued into a good discussion on gene splicing, and how, from a scientific perspective, Senketsu isn’t related to Ryuko at all or her clone even if his Life Fibers were spliced with her DNA. 7 below includes the entire conversation.

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/directory#role>
2. <http://machinedeep.tumblr.com/post/71471623570/alright-ya-beebs-heres-the-deal-aint-sayin-you>
3. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/90923453499/from-the-anime-expo-kill-la-kill-panel-with-sushio>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uILfolIhVA>
5. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/135333934075/h0saki-some-uniform-and-kamui-transformation>
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twI8KIAvZSg>
7. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/137661095265/murasakidoku-fuckyeahryuketsu-the-chokey>

Anonymous asked: There was a rather interesting article I saw here a while back about Senketsu, the gist of it was people expected Senketsu to be the mentor character because that's the cliché, but instead he's someone whose as clueless as Ryuko herself which is why they sympathize with each other. I think a lot of people never get past appearances when it comes to this show. Then again, it shouldn't be that hard, I mean these are characters outright said to be soulmates in the show.

It really does make me wonder. Tons of people expected Senketsu to die in the end simply because he's perceived as the *type* of character who would. He's the mentor/father figure, and a good way to express that a protagonist is all grown up by the end and can take care of themselves is to show them moving on from such a character... often by tugging on your heartstrings by having said character killed off.

But I just think... *why* is Senketsu so commonly taken this way? It's pretty much the universal fandom interpretation. Pick up any fanfiction, and it tends to lean this way. Headcanons abound about Senketsu sounding like Soichiro, and let's not forget that a huge popular theory back when the show was airing was that Senketsu literally *is* Isshin. (Ick!) That article¹ uses the point of appearances to account for a big part of this; Senketsu *looks* like the doting, parental mascot type. But is there more to it than that?

The fan-edited wiki TV Tropes puts on Senketsu's character bio² that he fits under the "Parental Substitute" trope because he "Nags, lectures, and worries for Ryuko like a real parent would." But if that's the case, why isn't Satsuki listed as a parental substitute for Ryuko, then? Or Mako? Both could be said to fret over her like worried parents if you wanted. On a similar vein, I think an even more fitting example would be Ryuko's behavior towards Mako at times. In episode 17, I have trouble viewing Ryuko promising Mako *snacks* to stay out of the fight as anything but her being like Mako's overprotective mommy. And what of Gamagoori, who worries over Mako and Ryuko's safety near the end of episode 8, to which the English dub even has Ryuko calling him *Dad* for it?

In my mind, nagging and lecturing and worrying are far from qualities unique to a parent. Sure, it may seem parental at times, and it's funny to joke about it, as Ryuko does in the dub! But I would never seriously say that Gamagoori is literally her parental substitute for a moment like that, nor

would I ever say the same for Ryuko regarding Mako. There is far more to being a parent than “be safe” and “go to bed on time.” Maybe I’m not one to talk—I’m definitely far from a parent myself—but isn’t being a parent about *raising* someone, about guiding and teaching them?

So bringing this all back to Senketsu, what does he do that really gives off that impression that it’s become such a popular reading of his character? I mean, I won’t deny that he seems parental at times—the most blatant example is probably the second Drama CD, where he chastises Ryuko to act like an adult. But he’s not really raising Ryuko, and he has no life experience to truly guide her. They’re *both* pretty clueless and figuring things out as they go, and you could make arguments for Ryuko being parental towards him at times, too, like when she tells him to suck it up and stop crying. I mean, it happens, when you care about someone.

I just wonder where we draw the line? Take *Transistor*. The protagonist Red and the Transistor are never blatantly stated to be romantically involved, but most people interpret them that way. And yet, the Transistor can be a lot like Senketsu. He tries to guide Red along, even though he doesn’t know what’s going on just as much as she doesn’t. He tells her where to go and what to do (even if she doesn’t listen), and is the game’s narrator. Why is this almost universally seen as romantic, whereas Senketsu is almost universally seen as parental?

I just find this endlessly fascinating...

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 22, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/127345122245/hm-are-you-talking-about-this-one-anon-it>

1. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Characters/KillLaKillMainCharacters?from=KillLaKill.MainCharacters>
2. <https://taylorryamage.wordpress.com/2015/05/27/sentient-sailor-uniforms-are-serious-business-trope-twisting-in-kill-la-kill/>
3. <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/post/88501469385/kill-la-kill-drama-cd-2>

Anonymous asked: Back on topic, Senketsu is Isshin came out of the same rumor mill where every single character was related because of some visual (Tsumugu is Ryuko's brother, his hair streak is red!). It's contradicted thematically and outright in the show and its original script ideas. It survives because it's an easy way to write off Senketsu and his relationship to Ryuko. This fanbase just loves to write off Senketsu and Ryuko by extension.

But is it really writing off Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship? From my perspective, that's not what the "Senketsu is Isshin" theory does, because father/daughter relationships are very important! The fact that Ryuko *didn't* have a good relationship with her father leaves a void; after all, she claims herself that they never got along, he abandoned her and didn't even look back, and she grew up lonely and miserable without him there as a good, positive influence in her life. The idea that *Senketsu is Isshin* is an interpretation that allows a way to fill this emptiness in Ryuko's heart, and gives Isshin the chance to make up for what he'd done. He's the caring, protective, loving father figure that Ryuko's always wanted.

I mean, I see the appeal here.

But... as nharime once pointed out¹ better than I could, this sort of interpretation rather writes off *Senketsu*. Senketsu is his own person. He's a brand new life, coming into this world for the first time and learning all about it. This is a huge part of his character arc and the plot, and to say instead that he's Isshin and thus has all this *baggage* is then incredibly contradictory—and sad! Senketsu doesn't deserve to make up for Isshin's mistakes! Since Isshin and Senketsu existed at the same time, it's reasonable to assume that they're *completely* different people.

Still, even if we go with the idea that Senketsu is simply a father figure, I also feel this is rather contradictory. The episode we first get this sense of Ryuko's separation from her father is episode 7, and the message is that she gets everything she would have wanted from him with the Mankanshokus. This is even made explicit in episode 8, where Mako assures Ryuko that she's not alone anymore because she has them in her life now. It's about family, and though Senketsu is certainly part of this family, too, it doesn't mean he's a *father*—and it doesn't fit with his character at all.

(Also, why do we have such an emphasis on father figures, anyway? Ryuko grew up completely without a mom and I never see much about how Sukuyo fills that role for her...)

Anyway, this is a bit rambling, but my point is: the “Senketsu is Isshin” or “Senketsu is a father figure” readings don’t write off Ryuko and Senketsu’s relationship. It writes off *Senketsu*, and it writes off the possibility for romance between the two. And I care more about their friendship than anything, but once more, I find it... a little concerning that we have this huge, popular interpretation that immediately denies it when they have such a good relationship that *would* (in my very biased opinion) make a good romance if they so wanted. It reminds me a bit of the Aang/Katara conversations about *Avatar* back when it was airing. Aang is younger and shorter than Katara, so even though they are great friends and respect each other and have a wonderful bond, a *romance* is out of the question and she must simply be something like his mother or big sister because this isn’t the “traditional” way a couple *should* look.

Of course, I love the idea of best friends just being best friends, too (especially between guys and girls, who are often shipped *just because*) but I don’t know... it just seems a little *off* to me that this sort of thing is so quickly denied for (unfitting) “they’re like a parent!” reasons when there *is* such a good relationship and the characters are in the same age group but they’d make a “non-traditional” couple, if that makes sense.

Notes and Links

A segment of my responses to responses to the “Is Senketsu Isshin?” essay (what a mouthful!), originally posted on January 19, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/137674291830/better-nude-than-rude-reblogged-your-post-is>

1. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/137600606739/like-the-klk-script-makes-senketsu-being-his-own>

whinydevil asked: I've been thinking about that whole "Isshin is Senketsu" interpretation. I don't like it and don't subscribe to it, but I had a thought: Not saying Freud was even close to being right, but don't people sometimes, consciously or unconsciously, gravitate toward partners that remind them of their parents? Or guardians or whatever? The first people they're close to, attach themselves to. [shrugs] I'd like to hear your thoughts about that kind of thing.

That's actually a question with a *ton* of research and discussion behind it. For some articles on the subject, check the "Notes and Links" section at the end of this essay if you're interested in reading more.

Personally, though? I've always been one to think that we're drawn to what's familiar to us, which is a sentiment addressed a lot in regards to this whole thing. "Opposites attract" sounds neat and all, and maybe there *is* something exciting and enticing about someone totally different from you, but—at least in my own experience—if I don't at least share *some* similarities with a person, I have trouble forming a very strong connection with them. Which is fine—you don't need to have some super deep connection with someone in order to get along well with them—but that's not the kind of person I'm likely to be really close to.

So, when we're asking the question of whether or not people seem drawn in some way to partners who remind them of their parents, the idea of familiarity may play a big role... both in terms of personality *and* physical appearance. For the personality part, Celeste Perron's CNN article¹ describes this idea well:

Berkeley, California, psychotherapist Elayne Savage says familiarity is a big reason people may choose someone like Mom or Dad as a partner.

"When you grow up familiar with a certain type of person, you're attracted to that same type of person because it feels comfortable, whether you like it or not," says Savage, author of "Breathing Room: Creating Space to Be a Couple." "That's what people mean when they meet a potential partner and say, 'It 'feels like I've known him my whole life.'"

For the physical appearance part, JR Thorpe's Bustle article² outlines

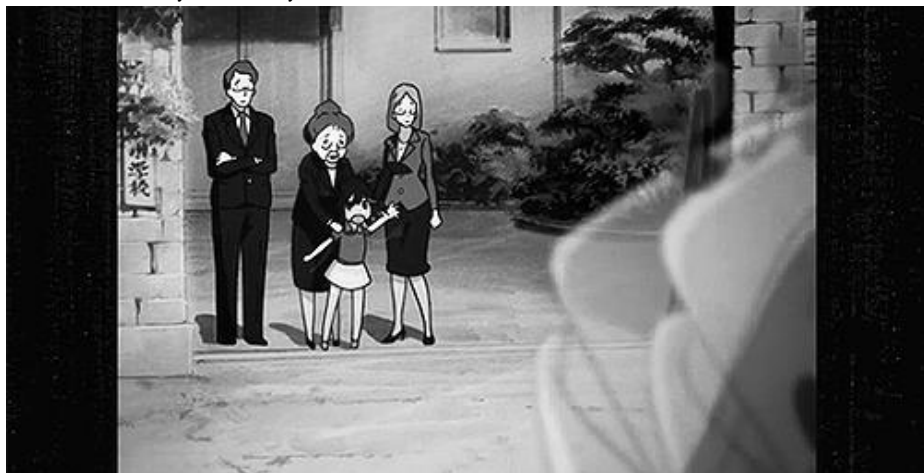
two theories in regards to the whole partners-resembling-parents situation.

One is the idea of prolonged exposure. Seeing a parent's face a lot may cement it as something that's loving and attractive in our minds, which means that as adults, we unconsciously are looking out for something similar. An example used here is sheep raised by goat mothers; come adulthood, the sheep preferred the company of goats rather than sheep like themselves, since they're more used to goats and find goats more comfortable.

The other idea is imprinting, which is expanded upon in the Dr. Justin J. Lehmiller article³ with an example of how Konrad Lorenz found that baby geese "imprint" on the first moving objects they see after birth, and thereby think of said object as their mother. In Lorenz's studies, many baby geese "imprinted" on him, and followed him around as though he were their mother. But more relevantly, as adults, the geese tried mating with *humans* who looked like Konrad rather than other geese!

So, let me bring this all back to Ryuko and Senketsu. Would Ryuko be attracted or drawn to Senketsu because his personality reminds her of her father's? We know very little about Isshin/Soichiro, but I'm still going to lean on *no* from what we do know.

One of Ryuko's key memories about her father is this...



...when he abandons her and doesn't even look back. Can you imagine Senketsu doing anything of the sort? I certainly can't! As I've written before (page 245), Senketsu is "practically the only one in the series who doesn't toy with [Ryuko], betray her, or abandon her in some sense; after all, Ryuko is left alone by her father, tricked and used by her sister and the Elite Four, abandoned and betrayed by Mako and her family when they grow rich and

greedy, used by Maiko, toyed with by Aikuro and Nudist Beach (to the point where Ryuko thinks that Aikuro knew everything about her and was just laughing at her for being a “freak” the entire time)... but never Senketsu. He stays by her side, always.” Isshin/Soichiro is a character who does what he must for the sake of the greater good, and though I’ll argue that he *is* regretful over what this means for people like his very own daughters, he still does it, and you don’t really see this remorse until his death. It’s hard to imagine Senketsu being that cold and calculating, because he is so defined by his loyalty to Ryuko and how much he cares about her.

Additionally, one of Ryuko’s goals in the series is about *learning* who her father was. She realizes she didn’t know him much at all, so it seems hard to imagine her feeling drawn to Senketsu for being like her dad when she doesn’t really know what her dad was like herself.

What about the physical appearance part? Well, I’ve argued many times that I *don’t* particularly think Senketsu resembles Isshin like, *at all*, but to each their own. I will say that the only real similarity of substance is the eyepatch, though, and I’m not so sure how much of a resemblance that creates when this is a series that *loves* eyepatches (note that Nui also has one, and take a look at the cat on page 85!), but I have very strong, biased opinions about this, so... Still, it’s worth noting that this is a similarity *never* pointed out or referenced by any of the characters nor even the show’s staff, and that the whole point of Senketsu’s eyepatch was to push this idea that he’s a character who is *growing*. Not very much like your standard wise father figure, then!

In my eyes, there’s very little to suggest that Ryuko would be drawn to Senketsu because he reminds her of her father. But. *But*. I *have* always argued that she’s drawn to him for reasons pertaining to familiarity. Not concerning her father, though. *Herself*.

Ryuko is (rightfully) very put off by Senketsu when they first meet, but she immediately calms down and (especially in the English dub) drops her “tough girl” attitude as soon as he explains himself and reveals that he doesn’t really know what’s going on at all... just as she doesn’t. As I wrote in my master Ryuko and Senketsu relationship essay on page 211:

Oh, Ryuko wants to know Senketsu, alright. Even though she distances herself, even though she’s not looking for friends, she sees something in Senketsu that she feels inexplicably drawn to.

It’s a bit *How to Train Your Dragon*. She sees herself, in him. Someone

confused. Someone searching for answers.

Significantly, the series also seems to put a fair level of emphasis on Ryuko being interested in understanding and knowing Senketsu:

Obviously, Ryuko wants to know Senketsu in that she wants to know how to wear him correctly so she can fight more efficiently, but she also shows immediate interest in knowing who he is as a person. Even though Ryuko says she just wants revenge and answers to the mystery of her father and his death, a scene midway through episode 2 already depicts her reaching out to Senketsu in the night not for the sake of garnering any answers about Daddy, but because she genuinely wants to come to understand this strange, sentient sailor uniform that's walked into her life:

Ryuko: Hey, you. Are you awake? [Pause] I wish I knew what the hell you are, Senketsu.

Notice not only her words, but how this is said. She's not being overtly cocky as she is to Satsuki and her lackeys. She's not running up and shaking him as some futile, bitter effort to force him into remembering something. She's calmly speaking out, wishing to talk to him about everything that's on her mind. He's confused, she's confused—they're in the same boat, and, remarkably, she actually tries to initiate a discussion about it.

Furthermore, it's worth pointing out that this scene is followed by a flashback of their meeting, which then shifts into Ryuko waking up in the morning. The implication here is that Ryuko can't stop thinking about Senketsu, and, with the fact that everyone else is asleep when she does try to talk with him, it also implies that she has trouble sleeping *because* she can't stop thinking about him.

So, basically? It's a huge point that Ryuko finds something familiar in Senketsu and that's why she feels drawn to him... but this is never implied to be that he reminds her of her father. It's instead that he reminds her of *herself*, which is a point that only becomes clearer as the show progresses. Come the revelation of who and what she is, Ryuko lashes out at Senketsu because they're the "same breed of monster" and he represents everything she hates about herself. Come the end of the series, she instead embraces and

finds great comfort in this similarity, proudly shouting to Ragyo that she and Senketsu aren't human or clothing, yet simultaneously *are* human and clothing, are everything.

And maybe that's part of why the father figure reading bothers me so much. It's such a big, recurring idea across the series that she and Senketsu are the same—and it's *what allows them to win in the finale!*—and seeing him as a father completely negates this.

And funnily enough, as the Bustle article points out, the whole idea of people being unconsciously attracted to partners like their parents may actually stem from being unconsciously attracted to *yourself*:

There is still a lot for science to explain when it comes to understanding why we might be attracted to people who look like our parents. Nobody has yet done a study on what this means for same-sex attraction, and whether gay women and men go for partners who look like their parents of the same gender. A study from 2010 has also thrown a wrench into the works by pointing out that, if people are shown supposedly "anonymous" faces with 45 percent of their own features spliced into them, they'll rate them as *very attractive* – which means we're just attracted to ourselves, and may be attracted to people who look like our parents as an extension of that. So we're narcissists who want *somebody with DNA* as similar to ours as possible. Good work, everyone.

~~Yeah, that's focused just on appearances, but still.~~

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 3, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/143825003130/ive-been-thinking-about-that-whole-issin-is>

For more on this topic, see:

1. <http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/personal/02/11/lw.programmed.to.marry.parents/>
2. <http://www.bustle.com/articles/84589-are-you-attracted-to-people-who-look-like-your-parents-science-thinks-you-are>
3. <http://www.lehmiller.com/blog/2013/3/27/are-we-sexually-attracted-to-people-who-remind-us-of-our-par.html>
4. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/tech-support/201405/why-your-partner-may-be-your-parent>

PLATONIC SOULMATES

Does the concept of a soulmate *have* to be romantic? Are there any stories out there featuring platonic ones?

Well, I don't think I've really come across too many examples of platonic soulmates myself, but ever since *Kill la Kill* took over my life um... a year and a half ago?, I just can't stop gushing over Ryuko and Senketsu, who share a relationship that I definitely think counts as an example!

First and foremost, we have Word of God saying that there is no romance present in the show at all¹, which is pretty refreshing in itself. This show is 110% *shounen* anime, and those *always* like to shove in a love arc, even when it might not make the most sense or be necessary.

But this series really doesn't! One of my favorite moments is when Ryuko talks about how much *both* her best friends mean to her, saying that they're *both* more than friends:

Ryuko: The word "friends" don't come close to covering it! They're something more, something I can't explain! That's what Mako Mankanshoku and Senketsu are to me!

In any other *shounen*, I am positive this would be The Ultimate Love Confession, but *Kill la Kill* feels like such a breath of fresh air in that it doesn't go this route, instead getting at this super crucial point that a relationship doesn't have to be romantic in order to be important.

And Ryuko and Senketsu are everything I would consider "soulmates" to be. They were quite literally made for each other, they're the same rare "species" and thus are very much kindred spirits and can understand each other better than anyone else in the series, they complement each other wonderfully, they're constantly reinforced as equals and perfect partners, and another character in the show—Mako—even outright defines them as soulmates in the episode 25 OVA.

And yeah, she's a silly character who is often hard to take seriously, but *still*. This just helps point even more to them being platonic soulmates.

Of course, I am totally guilty of liking them romantically, but what I love is that the show never forces any romance between them at all. They are "two in one" and perfectly matched," and this is never made to seem like it has to be romantic. Their relationship is important and special and

there's *never* the nasty implication that the only way it can be those things is if it's a romance.

Kill la Kill does a lot wrong, and I'll be the first to admit that. But this stuff right here? Ryuko and Senketsu? That's doing a lot *right*.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 5, 2015, as a response to a “soulmates AU” post URL:

<http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/120828918932/lightningrangi-gehayi-capaldicious>

1. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/90923453499/from-the-anime-expo-kill-la-kill-panel-with-sushio>

RYUKO AND SENKETSU'S RELATIONSHIP: MASTER ESSAY

There's this quote from Hayao Miyazaki¹ that I really like to take to heart, as both a writer myself and as a lover of fiction.

It goes like this:

Hayao Miyazaki: I've become skeptical of the unwritten rule that just because a boy and girl appear in the same feature, a romance must ensue. Rather, I want to portray a slightly different relationship, one where they two mutually inspire each other to live—if I'm able to, then perhaps I'll be closer to portraying a true expression of love.

Against all my expectations, *Kill la Kill* ended up being the type of show that managed to get pretty damn close to this “true expression of love” that Miyazaki describes. Because unlike the generic action *shounen* with generic monster-of-the-week battles that I'd initially written the series off to be, *Kill la Kill* is, at its heart, not really about the fighting. It's a character-driven story, and a story dedicated to the relationships between these characters.

You could probably make an argument that there's some true lovin' going on with a lot of the relationships the show explores, but the purpose of this essay is to make an argument for just one: the relationship between Ryuko and Senketsu.

Before I get down deep into that, though, I want to expand on Miyazaki's sentiment up there. What makes this particular quote so noteworthy is that it draws light to the rather... unhealthy obsession this day and age has with *romance*. Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with it—and honestly, I'd really be one to talk if there was—but pushing a romance simply for the sake of having a romance has become increasingly tired. And with all these tacked-on love stories flooding the gates of fiction everywhere, it's not hard to see the not-so-kind message that in order for a relationship to be important or significant, it has to be romantic.

Kill la Kill? It just ain't that kind of series. There are arguably-romantic elements, but this is not the focus of what the show's trying to do. Rather, the focus here is to depict how and why characters are important to each other and why this matters. It's about putting the *relationship* before the blushes and the handholding and the kisses. About making something more

genuine and heartfelt than the generic and superficial. You know, about “mutually [inspiring] each other to live.”

When it comes to Ryuko and Senketsu, doing just that is, well, the very core of everything *Kill la Kill*.

What It's All About

It probably goes without saying that I'm of the opinion that, regardless of the baffling, “style-over-substance, turn-your-brain-off-to-enjoy” labels that have been “bestowed” upon *Kill la Kill*, it is a show that has a lot to say.

As I've mentioned, it is character-driven, and (to the chagrin of many, it seems), our main character Ryuko is the one doing most of the driving. If you asked me to finish the sentence, “*Kill la Kill* is the story of...,” I would finish it with a focus on Ryuko's character arc, because, at the end of the day, even when the show's about way too many things to cram into one measly little sentence, above everything else, it is Ryuko's story.

So what is Ryuko's story, and, subsequently, *Kill la Kill*, then? It's surely a story chock-full of ridiculous, but amidst all the outlandish plot elements and silly, over-the-top nature, it is, at its heart, the simple and compelling story of a closed-off and lonely teenage girl finding her place in the world and learning to open her heart to others.

And over the course of the show, Ryuko certainly meets a nice handful of people who help her through this development. But the main driving force behind it? No matter the scoffs that he's “just clothing,” it's none other than Senketsu, thereby making him—and, most significantly here, his relationship with Ryuko—absolutely crucial to *Kill la Kill*.

The love between Ryuko and Senketsu, then, means far more to the series than just being a wonderful thing to see on the screen. It is also of utmost importance to the plot—in fact, you might even say that in many ways, it *is* the plot.

For this plot to work? Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship has to be absolutely *stellar*. It's pretty much *required* to be something like Miyazaki describes.

And oh boy. It is.

Ryuko and Her First Appearance

It's true that this “closed-off and lonely” part of Ryuko's character isn't really all that evident right away, but in as little as two minutes after her introduction in the first episode, the show's already gone and established a

big part of this: that Ryuko's not exactly who she makes herself out to be.

So, a little rundown here. It takes about four minutes into episode 1 before Ryuko finally makes her entrance, and when she does, she starts it off by throwing the audience a thoroughly badass scowl, goes on to bite straight into a *lemon*, and when a gang picks a fight with her shortly afterwards, she's oozing with confidence and not even the least bit threatened.

As a viewer, we (think) we get who Ryuko is right away, with a scene like this. She's rough and tough and rebellious, and if you know what's good for you, you ain't gonna mess with her.

After all, this little sequence of events seems like a whole lot of badassery going on. But... wait. Then you realize that this "gang" is really just a bunch of little kids. And then you see that, upon their surrender, Ryuko's quick to leave them alone in a way that seems less "hardass bitch" and more "amused and well-meaning girl."

What we end up with—and again, after a whopping *two minutes*—is that Ryuko's certainly hardcore, but she's also a bit (or maybe more-than-a-bit) of a softie. Which, judging from her big 'ole pompous act prior to the gang's surrender, is not something that she particularly wants you to know about her.

Fast-forward some and this is only made more concrete. Ryuko is condescending and angry when she first encounters Satsuki, but in private, she's not mad or pissed or screaming, but markedly *sad*, filled with regret and anguish after getting completely pummeled.

Both of these instances deal with the same issue for Ryuko. She wants to find out who killed her father, but unlike the cocky, rage-filled display she puts forth for Satsuki, it's not really about revenge. It's about her intense desire for family, and how her father was all she had in that department, yet she knew basically nothing about him. Beneath it all, she wants to *know* him, not avenge him.

Though this information is not revealed until many episodes after episode 1, a viewer can already read a lot into Ryuko's despair. This is about the closest you'll see her to crying 'til the end of the series, and from the way she holds back these tears to the juxtaposition with her heated monologue at Satsuki, you can see that she's the type of person who doesn't want you to think that she gets caught up in "weak" emotions like sadness or grief because she hardens all that into unadulterated rage that should leave you trembling in fear.

Which makes sense, of course. The father she fights to know essentially

abandoned her at a young age, and she found it necessary to be tough and pick fights to protect herself as she grew up alone and friendless in a boarding school. She's got barriers and barriers up, and she's not gonna let just anyone past those to see how compassionate and tenderhearted she really is.

And then enter Senketsu.

Senketsu and His First Appearance

Viewers meet Senketsu when Ryuko does. Of this encounter Toshihiko Seki, Senketsu's voice actor, had this² to say:

Toshihiko Seki: I think that a person's foremost wish is to "know one's self." Ryuko and Senketsu both said to each other, "I want to know you."

(Part of) what makes the relationship between Ryuko and Senketsu so compelling is this concept right here. Upon their meeting, Ryuko hardly knows who she is. She knows who she makes herself out to be, but she hasn't come to terms with who she *really* is beneath all that. And Senketsu, as it turns out, is in the same boat. He suffers from memory loss and doesn't know who he is at all. Both, then, are uncertain regarding their own identity, and both are also in search of the answers. Significantly, the two also represent a means of finding these answers for each other.

For Ryuko, Senketsu is a way to learn more about her father, and, consequently, more about who *she* is, too. For Senketsu, Ryuko is the daughter of his creator, and through working with her, he can find out more about who (and what) the heck *he* is. Through getting to know each other, then, the two of them can learn to know themselves.

This accomplishes two things. One, it establishes Senketsu right off the bat as a sort of kindred spirit to Ryuko, being equally confused as she is and equally searching for himself. Two, especially when Ryuko says this...

Ryuko: Why did he make you...? Hey, if I've got you, then maybe I can beat those assholes!

...viewers are confronted immediately with the concept that Ryuko views Senketsu as the key to everything she's looking for. She's absolutely convinced that Satsuki knows the truth behind her father and his death—all

she has to do is kick some ass to get it. Senketsu is the way to kick that ass. Senketsu is literally *answers* to Ryuko.

Which sounds pretty dehumanizing, when you put it that way. But it's not like that doesn't make sense. I mean, this is a superpowered sailor uniform we're talking about. Just a weapon. A tool.

Right?

Wrong.

Let me return to what Seki said. Ryuko and Senketsu want to *know* each other, and this is so integral to the show that it becomes one of the major plot points of the early episodes: Ryuko's struggle to "get naked."

I Finally Get It Now

Of course, Ryuko's realization in episode 3 to stop being so ashamed over Senketsu's skimpy battle form is the subject of *much* discussion and debate separate from the development of this relationship. And I won't deny the significance of talking about these things, but for the purposes of this essay, I'm going to extend the conversation to another element that may not be so highly discussed: what this moment means for Ryuko and Senketsu as people, and *especially* what it means for Ryuko's character development.

It is the most crucial point of Ryuko's character arc that she slowly but surely opens her heart up to others, and—ridiculous as it may be said to be—it is Senketsu that first ignites this change. What the huge, triumphant "get naked" scene represents is Ryuko's first big step in doing so, made especially apparent with the dialogue:

Ryuko: I finally get it now. I need to get naked. Putting on a Kamui... means becoming one with you. It means you... becoming one with me! That's what it means to master wearing you! Isn't that right, Senketsu?!

Senketsu: Yes, exactly!

...

Ryuko: Now I feel it! This is what you're really like, isn't it?

Senketsu: Yes, this is our power!

Ryuko: I didn't know I was doing it, but I was rejecting you out of embarrassment. That's why you were drinking so much blood! And

the more I pulled away, the more blood you needed to get closer!
That's why it's working now, right?

It's... pretty blatant.

Ryuko needs to open her heart—"get naked"—otherwise, she and Senketsu can't work together as they should. Which, obviously, is absolutely monumental to the show, since we're led to believe that this fight isn't something Ryuko can take alone. But there's a lot more than just that to this exchange.

What this also does is further cement Senketsu as more than a mere tool, portraying him as a legitimate character whose relationship with the protagonist has massive consequences on the plot. Notably, Senketsu is not a neutral party in Ryuko's plight who simply goes with the motions; he warns her, protects her, and, most significantly, he sincerely *wants* her to succeed. This point is even made explicit in the episode's preview³, which Senketsu narrates:

Senketsu: What's wrong, Ryuko? Hurry up! Put me on and use me properly already!

Ryuko, of course, can't succeed with Senketsu unless she lets him into her heart. She tries, but her embarrassment holds her back. As a result, Senketsu is forced to compensate for this by drinking too much of her blood. Particularly with Ryuko's line that "the more [she] pulled away, the more blood [Senketsu] needed to get closer," what's communicated is that, much like Seki commented, Senketsu desperately wants to know Ryuko.

And with Ryuko's hesitance to accept him, it does raise some questions. Does she *honestly* want to know Senketsu as well? Does she even want to open up her heart at all?

In a word, *yes*.

Obviously, Ryuko wants to know Senketsu in that she wants to know how to wear him correctly so she can fight more efficiently, but she also shows immediate interest in knowing who he is as a person. Even though Ryuko says she just wants revenge and answers to the mystery of her father and his death, a scene midway through episode 2 already depicts her reaching out to Senketsu in the night not for the sake of garnering any answers about Daddy, but because she genuinely wants to come to understand this strange, sentient sailor uniform that's walked into her life:

Ryuko: Hey, you. Are you awake? [Pause] I wish I knew what the hell you are, Senketsu.

Notice not only her words, but how this is said. She's not being overtly cocky as she is to Satsuki and her lackeys. She's not running up and shaking him as some futile, bitter effort to force him into remembering something. She's calmly speaking out, wishing to talk to him about everything that's on her mind. He's confused, she's confused—they're in the same boat, and, remarkably, she actually tries to initiate a discussion about it.

Furthermore, it's worth pointing out that this scene is followed by a flashback of their meeting, which then shifts into Ryuko waking up in the morning. The implication here is that Ryuko can't stop thinking about Senketsu, and, with the fact that everyone else is asleep when she does try to talk with him, it also implies that she has trouble sleeping *because* she can't stop thinking about him.

She wants to know Senketsu. A lot.

But what's so significant about her actions in this scene is that these early episodes especially present Ryuko as a rather withdrawn character. In school she's quiet and not eager to make any new friends—one just happens to stick to her like glue, and Ryuko doesn't shy away from displaying her initial disinterest in the friendship. In an early scene, Ryuko dodges Mako as she comes flying at her with a completely deadpan expression, even as Mako ends up crashing into trash cans.

When it comes to Mako's family as a whole, Ryuko is depicted as mostly keeping to herself and saying little to them. In episode 2, she's overwhelmed by their eccentricity and can't find it in her to utter a single word as food is forcibly shoved down her throat in their first family dinner scene. Come episode 5, she's undoubtedly warmed up to them (and they to her, as she has her own named bowl!), but she still sticks a lot to her own little world. In this episode's dinner scene, she's worried over her earlier encounter with Tsumugu, but she doesn't express her concerns to the family; she instead remains silent, only voicing, at Mako's prompting, that she's finished eating.

So, she's pretty clearly introverted. Withdrawn. Maybe even a little shy, even if she likes to hide that niggling detail. But when it comes to Senketsu? She wants to talk to him immediately, about everything they're going through. In the previously-mentioned episode 5, while she won't open up to her newfound family about this formidable man pursuing her at school,

she *does* loudly and openly discuss it with Senketsu, and this episode also provides further information regarding their relationship. It's revealed that Ryuko is "always whispering to" him—enough that it startles and appalls Mako's entire family. Later in the episode, Mako even feels the need to remind Ryuko that "Senketsu isn't [her] only friend!", a sentiment that is reiterated again in episode 8 (at least, in the Japanese script, anyway).

Oh, Ryuko wants to know Senketsu, alright. Even though she distances herself, even though she's not looking for friends, she sees something in Senketsu that she feels inexplicably drawn to.

It's a bit *How to Train Your Dragon*. She sees herself, in him. Someone confused. Someone searching for answers.

It may not be the easiest for her, being so used to being on her own, but slowly but surely, Ryuko lets Senketsu—and others!—into her heart.

The "get naked" scene does wonders for this. Ryuko realizes that she doesn't have to fight this fight alone, and that hey, maybe letting someone into her life can be a really *good* thing! She loves the surge of power she gets when she truly accepts Senketsu as her partner, and she's absolutely ecstatic to know that they're *finally* being a proper team.

Friendship? Lookin' pretty good for her.

But... Wait

After episode 3, could you *really* say that Senketsu and Ryuko are friends? After all, episode 5 has this little exchange between them:

Ryuko: You're just a piece of clothing! So be quiet and be worn by me!

Senketsu: Just a piece of clothing, you say?

...which somehow leads to Senketsu jumping out to save Ryuko's life at the cost of his own at the episode's end, and *these* huge declarations from both characters:

Ryuko: You'll have to pry him out of my cold, dead hands!

Senketsu: Don't you dare lay a finger on Ryuko. Do, and I'll make you pay.

And yeah. It can seem a pretty abrupt change.

Sure, I've been yapping on about how much Ryuko and Senketsu want to know each other and how Ryuko goes on opening up to him so much even though she's a withdrawn gal, but really? Who am I to say that they're not both just selfish—that they really only see each other as a means to the answers they so desire?

Fact is, Ryuko and Senketsu got off to a pretty rocky start in episode 1, in episode 2 their interaction is rather limited, episode 4 is really more of a long gag than anything else, and though there's the “get naked” scene I've already spoken endlessly about in episode 3, is that seriously merit enough for these heroic, risking-my-life-for-you proclamations at the end of episode 5?

Well... yeah.

But let me first discuss the selfish undertones these supposedly *selfless* acts do contain. For Senketsu, though Ryuko may be hot-blooded and quick to argue with him, she's also literally all he has in the world. Nobody else can hear his voice, and at this point in the story, nobody else really acknowledges that he's alive, either. In a narration previewing episode 20⁴, Senketsu reveals that without Ryuko, he sees himself as “just a fluttering sailor uniform.” Regardless of the harmful connotations, Senketsu puts all his life's meaning in Ryuko at this point in the story. Without her, what does he have? Protecting her life, then, can be viewed only as an extension of protecting himself.

For Ryuko, she's dead-set on finding her father's killer. Prior to the series she traveled to high school after high school scouring for answers. She gets her ass whooped time and time again in all her efforts. She deals with perverts ogling her body in all her efforts. She takes a lot of crap, but she never gives up because, quite frankly, she's determined *as fuck*.

It's easy to read Senketsu as just another annoyance on her laundry list of annoyances in this quest she's gotten herself into. After all, in these early episodes we do see her get irritated with him on multiple occasions, and for the most part, she's only really happy with him when they're performing well together. In the very same episode that she defends him with her life, she calls him a mere piece of clothing and complains pretty much every time he says anything to her, as though he's only a tool and tools should just shut up and let her do her thing. All losing him could mean, then, is losing something that she sees as necessary to her goals—a power source, if you will, who also has the bonus of maybe having some information, too.

And who knows? With all the dangerous battles she gets herself into, maybe she *would* die for that.

So, selfishness? It could certainly be there. But the *selflessness* and love they share for one another far outweighs it.

Let me begin with Senketsu. By episode 5, a few things have been established thus far regarding his character. Namely, he's extremely loyal, brutally honest, and endlessly patient. Above all else, though, *loyalty* feels like his defining trait. He decides to help Ryuko in episode 1 and he sticks with this decision, giving her all the information she needs to win the tennis match in episode 2, unsynchronizing with her in episode 3 to prevent her from fainting due to blood loss, and refusing to work with Maiko in episode 4. This last instance is even joked about:

Senketsu: I'm sorry I was late.

Ryuko: Nah, it's cool. It's not like ya cheated on me or anything.

In a sense, Senketsu can be viewed as a foil to Satsuki's monstrous Junketsu. Whereas Junketsu is constantly shown trying to take advantage of its users, Senketsu is established early on as someone who cares a *lot* for the wellbeing of those who wear him. Note again his unsynchronizing with Ryuko in episode 3; Satsuki finds this fascinating (and pitiful) enough to openly comment on it:

Satsuki: Hmph. How pathetic. Your Kamui might have spared you from passing out, but in a dormant Kamui, you might as well be naked.

What makes this particularly noteworthy is that though these early episodes are chockfull of Senketsu warning Ryuko about losing too much blood, it's easy to argue that this could be purely for those *selfish* reasons. Sure, he gets Ryuko to back out from a fight against Satsuki in episode 2 that she surely would have lost, but this saves his own hide just as much as it saves Ryuko's. Unsynchronizing with her, though—this is a move that pretty much guarantees their loss. But he still does it anyway because he's loyal to Ryuko and cares about Ryuko. He's not going to make her faint by sucking too much of her blood.

And that speaks volumes. Senketsu could have sucked Ryuko dry—and he might even have some semblance of a desire to, considering how excited

he gets by Ryuko's blood in episodes 1 and 2—but he puts Ryuko's needs first.

Additionally, though episode 1 makes it pretty clear that Senketsu has a good amount of mobility, episode 5 reveals that Senketsu could literally have just left Ryuko at any time. Yet... he never does. Combined with the fact that Senketsu *does* want Ryuko to reach her goals, all his warnings and advice come off as wholly genuine.

Senketsu cares about this girl. Why else be so inclined to help her get to school on time, as he is in episode 4? Why else refuse to work with Maiko? Why else save her from passing out and stick with her even when it looks like they're going to lose terribly? Why else warn her not to wear him—which seems to be what he wants the most—when there's the threat of Tsumugu?

Selfishness is likely present when Senketsu defends Ryuko with his life in episode 5—well, it most certainly is, because, actually, *everything's* a little selfish, and there ain't nothing wrong with that. But prior to that moment he's shown such sincere concern for Ryuko's well-being and an unwavering loyalty to her, thereby making the scene absolutely live up to the heroic, self-sacrificing moment it plays itself off as.

Ryuko's not becoming friends with someone who wants simply to use her. This is someone who *cares*. Someone who really, truly loves her.

As for Ryuko's willingness to die for Senketsu, the more affectionate reasoning also lies within her character. Episode 7 reveals her great desire for family, and episode 20 extends this with a fantasy sequence orchestrated by Ragyo that turns her lonely and deprived childhood into one with a perfect, loving mother.

What this tells us? That Ryuko's a very tender girl, that she longs for companionship, that even though she hides it all behind bravado, she's immensely sweet, compassionate. After all, to Mataro's gang in episode 1 she's playful and shows mercy, and though she claims to Nagita in episode 13 that she doesn't fight for anyone else, she can't help but go to "his" rescue when danger arises, even though they'd just met:

Ryuko: Hold it! What do you think you're doing to that guy?

Nagita: Matoi...

Ryuko: Don't be so whiny. You know I couldn't stand by and do nothing.

Likewise, she's quick to come to Mako's aid time and time again these early episodes when they're still barely acquainted. Though it's complete speculation, it's not too far-fetched to believe that many of the fights she picked prior to the series were in defense of others, considering how protective she's shown to be even to those who are essentially strangers. Then episode 5 happens, and here's someone willing to defend *her*—willing to *die* for her.

Even though Ryuko's true desires haven't been revealed by the time episode 5 rolls around, an especially poignant moment in the bathroom sequence with Tsumugu at the episode's end is when Ryuko comes to the realization that there's someone out there willing to defend and risk his life for her rather than the other way around for once.

And that's huge to her. A tremendous amount of time is spent focusing on Ryuko's reaction, further emphasizing this fact. And with how defensive viewers have already witnessed Ryuko to be, *of course* she's going to return Senketsu's gesture. It'd be wildly out-of-character for her not to.

Now, it's easy to say that Ryuko's intense awe and disbelief is wholly because she's shocked that someone would die to protect her, but I would argue that it's something a lot simpler than that. What *really* hits her? It's that there are people out there who actually care about her.

Episodes 19-20, as well as the fourth Drama CD, tell us that Ryuko is severely *not okay* with the revelation that she's not exactly human. When Nui taunts her, both in episode 20 and the Drama CD, saying that Ryuko's just like her, that they're soul sisters... she's horrified. Nui, as she says, is a monster. And she can't be one as well, because that would mean her father's abandonment of her was justified.

Ryuko *seriously* cares about other people. She powers through so many hardships because she cares so much about her dad, because she wants desperately to know who he was, because she yearns for family, because she doesn't understand why her father was never much of a "family" to her at all. I think there's merit to the idea that she felt something was wrong with her; she describes herself as a "full-blown juvenile delinquent" and says that she "started to turn bad" as a child, after all, but the truth is that she just plain didn't know why she had such a lonely time growing up.

Then there's the Big Reveal, and she thinks she finally gets it. If she's never been human at all, but actually some terrifying monster freak, *no wonder* her dad left her. She doesn't deserve love, and she never did.

I bring this up because in considering why Ryuko's so shaken up at this concept that people can care about her, we also have to consider why she's always been so closed-off and afraid to open up. Part of it is surely because she was bullied as a kid so she had to "toughen up" and hide away all her real feelings, but another aspect is that she's simply confused, and scared. Why did Dad leave her and not even look back? Will anyone she ever tries to grow close to inevitably do the same?

Full of fear, confusion and uncertainty, this awful concoction of a childhood leaves Ryuko a severely lonely girl. No family before the series, really, and apparently no friends, either, and even though *she's* highly compassionate, she's not used to having anybody caring about her much. Senketsu's—and Mako's!—blatant display that she's loved and a *friend* is shattering.

Of course, Ryuko doesn't just defend Senketsu with her life because she's simply a very protective person or because she's merely returning a favor. No, she, just as Senketsu does for her, displays very real and genuine concern prior to the bathroom scene in episode 5. As I've mentioned, she cares a lot about people, and even early on in the show, this definitely, *especially* is true for Senketsu.

Consider the opening of episode 4. Here, Ryuko has a nightmare involving Senketsu being chopped to bits. She's so horrified by this that she wakes up screaming, but pointedly, the fact that she's already having nightmares about losing him signifies that in not much time at all, Senketsu's wiggled into her heart and become someone she sincerely cares about.

When Mako tells her moments later that she must "be really lonely" for naming and crying out for her sailor uniform, Ryuko goes on crying out for him anyway, conveying not only that she cares for Senketsu, but also that she's comfortable enough with Mako knowing that she cares for him—kinda a big deal for someone who likes to hide her more tender emotions. Compare, for instance, how she defends Mako in episode 2:

Omiko: Sooo, does this mean you wanna take her place?

Ryuko: Might as well. I kinda owe her for dinner and a bed.

Ryuko obviously cares a lot for Mako, but she doesn't let Omiko on into how much. She puts on this very cool, relaxed persona here—clearly, Mako's abuse at the hands of the tennis club absolutely pisses her off, but she then

backpedals and says that she's only fighting on Mako's behalf because it's simply a way to make up for some sort of debt. It's not a, "How dare you hurt her!" kind of challenge, even though that's undoubtedly how Ryuko feels inside. It's instead, "Well, I owe it to her anyway."

This pretty much sums up Ryuko's attitude towards defending people early on in the show. She always plays it rather impersonally, like a detached but undeniably badass hero. In episode 1 she saves Mako without much of a word about it, and same goes for the second time Ryuko rescues her in episode 2. In episode 5 when Mako's kidnapped *again*, she just declares that it's "pretty low" to be taking hostages—nothing about how she's worried for her friend, though she is, considering that moments later she advises Mako to "worry about [her] life before [her] lunch" because she's "gonna get fatally wounded one of these days."

What the episode 5 bathroom scene also accomplishes, then, is mark a turning point in Ryuko. Here's an enemy who could very possibly kill her, but she drops her tough act instantly after Senketsu risks his life for her, wrapping him in a very tender embrace that wouldn't be possible if she didn't care a lot for him, in front of both Mako and Tsumugu (and later, even Nonon and her bandmates). There's no shyness or embarrassment here. She cares so much about Senketsu, and even if you think it's impossible or ridiculous, she's going to make sure you know it. The intimate hug between them is given special focus, with Tsumugu thinking as he looks upon them:

Tsumugu: These two... care for each other?

...which tells us that Ryuko actively displays her compassion towards Senketsu in such a manner that even the stubborn and thick-skinned Tsumugu gets it. And she doesn't stop. She stays true to her word and continues to cling to Senketsu, any embarrassment over her own kindheartedness be damned.

And after this? Ryuko is considerably more relaxed with showing how she truly feels—for instance, note how much sweeter her rescue of Nagita in episode 13 is compared to her rescue of Mako in episode 2—but this is especially true when it comes to Senketsu. When she wakes up again after the incident she immediately shouts his name and searches desperately for him, and, upon seeing him alright and with her, she openly sighs in relief and *tells* him of how relieved she is that he's okay.

Then of course we get the moment where she calls him her friend:

Ryuko: Senketsu. You and I need to become even stronger. No, we CAN become even stronger. If we're together.

Senketsu: Yes. After all, I'm your precious only set.

Ryuko: No, that's not what you are. You're my friend.

And she means it. In the following episode, she rails at Aikuro because she's pissed "that bastard [Tsumugu] tried to kill Senketsu!" After beating Gamagoori in episode 9, she eagerly squeals to Senketsu about how happy she is at their victory, saying, "That positive outlook of yours is what I love about you, Senketsu!" In episode 13, she pushes everyone away, but ultimately comes to confess everything on her mind to Senketsu, portrayed as such a big deal that the whole Mankanshoku family (sans Mako) peek in on it, full of anticipation. Come episode 14, she gets pretty dang close to bawling in front of Aikuro of all people when she fears Senketsu dead:

Aikuro: Snippy, aren't we?

Ryuko: Of course I am. I... I lost Senketsu.

And so on.

What I find so compelling about Senketsu and Ryuko's relationship? It's *this*. That Ryuko's spent so much time being alone and bottling all her feelings up, but with Senketsu and when it comes to Senketsu, her walls come crashing down. And, slowly but surely, she comes to embrace everything she'd once hidden away.

Nobody's Ever Unraveled Me Like This Before

Before anyone else, we see Ryuko show her more compassionate, softer side to Senketsu. One of my favorite moments between the two is the ironing scene in episode 6:

Ryuko: I'm glad my plan for you to blind Sanageyama worked.

Senketsu: Being cut up was rather painful, I'll have you know.

Ryuko: Sorry about that.

Not only is this one of the first, most blatant displays of how tenderhearted Ryuko really is that the show gives us, but it's also included solely for the purpose of furthering Senketsu and Ryuko's relationship. You could take this scene out and it wouldn't affect the episode all that much; we get a moment later where Ryuko apologizes for cutting Senketsu in battle, effectively bringing across well enough that she doesn't want to hurt him and that she cares about him all in one little line.

So, as with any story, every scene should be there for a reason and serve a purpose. The only purpose this has is to emphasize Ryuko and Senketsu growing closer as friends, which does bring up some questions, like, *Why is this here?* Or, *Why did Trigger dedicate time to this?*

Well, it all goes back to what I said in the start. *Kill la Kill* is, at its most basic level, Ryuko's story. And Ryuko's story, like all the *shounen* series that the show mocks and embraces, is very much centered on friendship. This scene exists to emphasize a huge part of that—namely, Ryuko showing Senketsu a side of herself that she usually hides, becoming more open, *changing*; this scene exists to tell the audience that Ryuko's letting Senketsu in, more than anyone else.

Here, instead of putting on some arrogant, "I'm so cool" sort of attitude, she comfortably and easily lets Senketsu know that she likes working with him and is happy working with him. When confronted that their plan had indeed hurt him, she apologizes genuinely. Ultimately, this scene was written and storyboarded and animated to show that their relationship is *not* just a girl and her sailor uniform or a girl and a weapon, but *friends* that are becoming so close that even the hot-blooded protagonist is starting to let her guard down around him.

Episode 7 continues this with a gentle scene in which Ryuko reveals to Senketsu her love of family dinners and opens up about her past to him before repeating the same information to both him and Mako in episode 8:

Senketsu: What is it? What is so funny?

Ryuko: Lively dinners are a great thing. Mom died when I was young, and Dad sent me off to a boarding school. So I don't have any experience with family dinners. I always thought that was pretty ordinary. Now I think meals taste better when eating with the whole

family...

Unfortunately, the power of this moment can't be conveyed all that efficiently with just a quote. What really almost *makes* it is Ryuko's voice actress, Ami Koshimizu. Typically, Koshimizu portrays Ryuko with a sort of rough and rowdy tone (a bit "growly," if you will, something associated with delinquent speech that the official subs and dub try to translate over to English with... mixed success), but here that is completely and totally absent. She sounds absolutely *sweet as honey*. She's being so utterly honest to Senketsu. There aren't any walls or barriers up here. No feigned cockiness. No overt badassery.

And then the sweet tone vanishes as soon as the boys try to peep on her, but this only helps mark the moment as something really special. She may be a little slow about it, but Ryuko really is trying to let people into her heart.

Come episode 10, we're presented with the following scene:

Senketsu: Your friend has finally started cheering for herself.

Ryuko: It sure looks that way. Still, that's classic Mako.

Senketsu: Your pulse and respiration have returned to normal. So, she's the key to getting you to relax?

Of course, this scene serves the obvious purpose of foreshadowing for episode 12, in which Mako's friendship with Ryuko *calms her down* and helps snap her out of her berserk, out-of-control state. Yet, I'd like to focus for a moment on a more basic element here—that this scene, along with many others in the Naturals Election arc, helps further this point that *family* means an incredible amount to Ryuko.

As previously mentioned, every scene should serve some sort of purpose in a story. So the show including all these cute little moments with Mako's family during this arc? It definitely has a reason behind it, and I'd say it's to make ultra-clear to the viewer that they've completely and totally accepted Ryuko into their lives. Basically, *that Ryuko has a real family now*.

In this arc, they're all cheering Ryuko on, even going so far as to use up all their available money to do so. One particular moment of interest, though, is when Sukuyo (Mako's mother) comments that Ryuko can't possibly lose, because Ryuko had eaten the lunch she'd made for her. It may just be one

little line, but considering the emphasis the show places on family dinners, I see it as something worth discussing.

Going back to the beginning of the show, Sukuyo *didn't* make Ryuko lunches. In episode 4 she only comments about having made one for Mako, and in episode 5, Ryuko is notably lunchless while Mako is not. By episode 7, it's clear that Ryuko's been wholly accepted into the family for multiple reasons, but one is indeed the fact that Sukuyo now makes her lunches, too. And the couple times these lunches are brought up, Ryuko is always exceedingly happy about them (and absolutely pissed when club members destroy one in episode 7). Concerning the lunch Sukuyo made for Ryuko before the Naturals Election, the show lingers an extra-long time on a shot of it, with very telling pieces of dialogue alongside it:

Mako: Is something the matter?

Ryuko: Nope! Your mom's lunches are delicious! Seriously, they're great.

Just moments before, Ryuko was irritated at Aikuro, but as soon as she's reminded of her lunch, she calms down and you get that sweet tone again. Family, and the reminder that she's loved and cared about—call it cheesy, but it leaves even Ryuko's fiery spirit at peace.

And in front of Senketsu, she doesn't try to hide these tender emotions. When he notices how happy her newfound family makes her she *lets* him notice and smiles. There's no denying it, no blushing, no, *What are you talking about you ridiculous uniform*, no embarrassment that she likes being loved and supported, no denial that this sort of thing calms her down, that Mako does. With him, she feels safe in showing so-called "weakness." Though she's been closing off her heart for so long, when it comes to Senketsu, she lets him right in.

I could really go on and on about this. Even when Ryuko's upset and hurt and pissed at the world as she is in episode 20, she *still* gives Senketsu a long, teary-eyed look and shows her true feelings to him, and even when she is embarrassed over her tender side, as she is concerning Satsuki in episode 22, she still doesn't deny it in front of Senketsu—she instead can only curse the fact that he can see right through her:

Senketsu: Ryuko. You were somewhat touched earlier, weren't you?

When you heard what Satsuki had to say.

Ryuko: Geez, this outfit doesn't know when to let up!

Senketsu: You could have come out and told her so.

Ryuko: Seriously, you are so obnoxious!

I've heard some conflicting information about whether or not "Ambiguous," the second opening song to *Kill la Kill*, is half about Senketsu and Ryuko and half about Satsuki and Ryuko, or just fully about Satsuki and Ryuko, but regardless of the true intention behind the lyrics, many of those used in the 90-second TV cut fit this aspect of Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship perfectly (translation courtesy of the Underwater subbing group):

I was trying to be someone I'm not
In a cramped world
With no breathing room
As I walked down my runway
I thought I'd concealed it
Behind the smile that masked my face
But it doesn't work on you
You always see through my façade
Nobody's ever unraveled me like this before

"Trying to be someone I'm not" easily fits Ryuko's tough front and "hardass bitch" attitude, and the song reveals this to be a "façade," which I would say is also fitting. Ryuko's not really some super angry, revenge-seeking teenager. She's lonely and yearning for love and she's compassionate, which Senketsu sees—and she *lets* him see. Like the song, he "unravels" her, but I'd also say he helps her to understand and embrace this.

Particularly, take note of Ryuko's character in episodes 14-15. It's these episodes that represent a shift in Ryuko's goals. She still wants to know more about her father, of course, but she puts something else—*someone* else—first: Senketsu. When he's torn to pieces, she takes it upon herself to pull him back together, traveling all across Japan and fighting for his sake. At the end of episode 14, there's this exchange between her and Senketsu:

Ryuko: I don't care who has it. I'm getting you back.

Senketsu: But in my current condition, I am unable to transform into Life Fiber Synchronize mode. How do you intend to fight an opponent like Satsuki?

Ryuko: Don't worry. I'll make up for the rest. I'm not the usual Ryuko Matoi right now. I'm a Ryuko Matoi who's fixated by seeing what she wants almost in reach.

It's a scene that really speaks for itself. As much as there are "Ryuko is badass without her uniform" comments concerning this arc, such sentiments rather miss the point. Ryuko is badass *for* her uniform, *for* Senketsu, and her determination is so fierce that the episode even outright discusses this itself. Ryuko's changed. She's let someone in and found someone she'll do anything to protect—and she gains incredible power from it, pretty much insta-KO'ing anyone that stands in her way.

Come episode 15, Ryuko and Satsuki have this discussion over their battle:

Satsuki: Have you forgotten that you went on a rampage when you gave in to rage? Have you forgotten the rage in your heart that wants revenge for your father?

Ryuko: I haven't forgotten! But I'm done wallowing in it! I'll never make another mistake like that again! I'll live for the desire of what's almost in reach, regardless of the rage that's almost in reach! The desire to take back my friend! To protect the friends that are precious to me!

After all her time alone, Ryuko finally has people who care about her, and they become her priority over everything else—even knowing the secret behind her father's death. And the reason Ryuko comes to this realization is largely due to her heart-to-heart with Senketsu in episode 13, after, as Satsuki notes, she'd lost control and gone berserk upon learning that Nui was her father's killer, which had led to a monstrous transformation between her and Senketsu that hurt him so badly that he cried. Pretty much the whole of episode 13 is spent sad and devastated due to this fact. But Senketsu tells her:

Senketsu: But when you were out of control, you did stop. Using your own willpower. That is why I am not frightened [of being with you] in the least.

...which fills Ryuko with a new determination. As she says to Satsuki, she can't "make a mistake like that again," and that's because she can't hurt a friend as she did to Senketsu again. *That's* more important than anything else to her—even knowing about her father—and it's Senketsu who really brings her to understand this.

Senketsu can literally see right through Ryuko, knowing her BMI and weight and respiration and heart rate and all sorts of things, but metaphorically, he also sees right through all the masks she covers her heart with. What episodes 14-15 show us is that he knows her well enough to remind her of what's really important to her and how compassionate she really is... and in a manner that she actually accepts it and gains new *resolve* from it.

But if that's not convincing enough, episode 17 makes this especially apparent when Senketsu pretty much flat-out tells Ryuko how kindhearted she is, saying, after she had yelled at Nudist Beach and defended him with her life once more:

Senketsu: No, you really did get angry on my behalf, Ryuko. That's the kind of person you are.

And this is a scene that *works*, since, right before Senketsu's statement here, Ryuko was being so honest with him, telling him all her fears and doubts, and even admitting that perhaps she *was* just being selfish and scared when she defended his humanity so angrily as she did (you know, chucking chairs and threatening to take on Tsumugu in her underwear and all). He knows her—she's consistently shown an openness and honesty with him that she doesn't with any other.

Ultimately, Ryuko easily and naturally lets Senketsu see who she is. She openly discusses her concerns with him and has multiple heart-to-hearts with him. She *trusts* him with the deepest parts of herself, more than anyone else in the series.

True Expression

Of course, you can't exactly have some "true expression of love" without having at least the foundation for a healthy relationship. And well... Senketsu's role in Ryuko's life has most definitely been a little controversial.

Mostly, it stems from his unfortunate introductory scene, in which he forces himself onto Ryuko. Their relationship is therefore criticized, and I've

even seen it compared to Stockholm Syndrome because Ryuko's been "forced" to wear Senketsu, as though she's a prisoner trapped in his Life Fibers. While I can understand the discontent with his first scene (I dislike it strongly as well), deeming Senketsu a terrible person for it and completely dismissing his and Ryuko's relationship as unhealthily awful is both unfair and rather sad.

Because, at the end of the day, Senketsu's first scene is completely out-of-character for who he is the entire rest of the series, and can be easily compared to when he loses control in episode 12 and devours Ryuko as a result. As previously mentioned, this makes him cry, described as "crying bitter tears," and though it *is* a shame we never see him react similarly (or apologize) regarding his behavior during his and Ryuko's first encounter, the fact remains that that's not who Senketsu is. Not one bit! Senketsu is highly loyal, respectful, and trusting of Ryuko, and denying that is to deny so much of what this series is about.

First off, no matter cries of "Stockholm Syndrome!", Senketsu *never* forces Ryuko to wear him again, and you can see this in several episodes, including:

- 13, in which Ryuko becomes afraid of herself and refuses to wear Senketsu as a result,
- 17, where Ryuko takes Senketsu off, determined to prevent him from being used as a mere weapon against his own kind,
- 20, in which Ryuko's anger and sadness behind the revelation of her own nature lead her to reject Senketsu and all her friends and allies,
- and even as early on as episode 2, where Senketsu is awakened by Ryuko's blood and starts begging for "more" just like his problematic opening scene... only to calm as soon as he sees her.

Fact is, Senketsu respects Ryuko. Even from episode 2 you can see this, from the way he helps her out in battle to the way he's completely and totally patient with all her antics.

Which is just another reason why the two of them work so well together: they complement each other wonderfully. Where Ryuko is brash

and quick to anger, Senketsu is patient and understanding. Whenever Ryuko goes through turmoil, Senketsu never pushes her; he waits and he helps her through it at her pace.

Consider episode 13 again. Here, Senketsu tries to talk to Ryuko early on:

Senketsu: Ryuko.

She tells him to shut up:

Ryuko: Zip it. Not a word out of you.

And he does indeed shut his trap, showing his respect for her as he waits until she's ready to open up to him. Only then does he say what he wants to say.

This is not Stockholm Syndrome. This is not forcing anyone to do anything. This is respect.

And this respect, combined with their trust and understanding of one another, makes for a pretty dang great relationship. But I want to add that the relationship is also very mutually beneficial.

The focus of this essay has been largely on Ryuko's arc—and I think I've already thoroughly discussed how Senketsu's helped her—so let me take a moment to discuss Senketsu's. Like Ryuko, he's confused and doesn't exactly know who he is, but also like Ryuko, by the end of the series, he does know... and he has a newfound appreciation for himself, too.

I've mentioned that Ryuko and Senketsu *click* so well together because they're kindred spirits, but episode 24 takes this a step further. They're not human or clothing, they're both, they're one in the same, they're everything. In the final battle, Senketsu *finally* takes Ryuko's words to heart and accepts himself as more than just a sailor uniform:

Senketsu: I have free will, and I can make myself understood by humans!

And, just like Ryuko's realization of what's really important to her, Senketsu's realization comes from being with Ryuko, both literally and metaphorically. Literally, their many battles together allowed him to "evolve," but metaphorically, it's his love for Ryuko that even leads him to this

conclusion in the first place. He doesn't know it until Satsuki's able to hear him, and the only reason he spoke out was because he was concerned for Ryuko.

Especially towards the end of the series, Senketsu becomes particularly emotional about Ryuko, and he's always overtaken with joy when someone else can understand his feelings. When Satsuki is able to hear him crying out for Ryuko in episode 24, though, he *gets it*. His emotions matter, just as much as anybody's. Though he's so used to putting himself down, so used to feeling so surprised that Ryuko could see him as anything more than a sailor suit, he finally *truly* recognizes that he loves and cares just as much as any human does—enough that he can make even someone who's not Ryuko hear it come straight from his mouth.

And it's this realization that helps him to save everyone. Which, when combined with the fact that Ryuko and Senketsu's teamwork is what's able to stop Ragyo for good, means that their relationship is, quite literally, *what saves the entire world*.

And if that ain't something damn close to a "true expression of love," I don't know what is.

Finally...

I said in the beginning of this... um, *incredibly long monster of an essay* that *Kill la Kill* is ultimately Ryuko's story. That it's about her finding her place in the world and learning to open up to others.

Well. Her relationship with Senketsu? She does all this thanks to meeting him.

Ryuko opens up to Senketsu before anybody else. She lets him see her at her most tenderhearted, and shows few qualms in letting anyone else know just how much she cares about him. Through Senketsu Ryuko finds a kindred spirit—pretty much the only one in the whole world who's just like her and can completely understand her. Ryuko discovers who she is through Senketsu, just as Senketsu discovers who he is through Ryuko. With Senketsu, Ryuko learns it's okay to let her barriers fall, and by the time of his death, she does, letting all her tender emotions out to her older sister.

Many people are quick to dismiss the possibility of anything romantic between Ryuko and Senketsu, as though this somehow spoils their entire relationship. But as Ami Koshimizu, Ryuko's voice actress, puts it⁵:

Ami Koshimizu: Senketsu and Ryuko are like friends, like lovers, are in a very comfortable/close-fitting relationship.

You can view them all sorts of ways. Brother and sister, true partners, the best of lovers, a mixture of all three. To ship them is no more “crack” or disingenuous to them than seeing them as family or BFFs, but at the end of the day, directly defining *what* this relationship is was not the point of *Kill la Kill*.

And, sure. I love a romance, and would have loved if they ended up having some big gooey lovefest (at the very least, this would guarantee that their relationship be taken more seriously than it is now). But what I love most of all is a relationship that is developed and inspired—you know, a relationship like the “true expression of love” that Miyazaki describes. In both ways, Ryuko and Senketsu’s relationship delivers.

No matter how you view them, the bond between these two is something special—something absolutely integral to everything *Kill la Kill*. And I could just go on and on about them. Every precious moment they share. How they have so much trust and how nothing can tear them apart, not even death. But this is already long enough as it is, and really, it’d just feel superfluous at this point.

No matter what he looks like, no matter how ridiculous it might sound, Senketsu is not a character to be ignored when examining *Kill la Kill*, and neither is his relationship with Ryuko.

After all, if Senketsu *were* just some tool, a mere weapon, a *thing*... well, you wouldn’t even have *Kill la Kill* at all.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on September 16, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/97697249505/the-relationship-between-ryuko-and-senketsu>

1. <http://nlcatp.org/34-incredible-hayao-miyazaki-quotes/>
2. <http://pastebin.com/DRSthFfY>
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBUnOEgqx_Q
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBer_p7Zm1Y
5. <http://pastebin.com/DRSthFfY>

SENKETSU'S AGE

Senketsu is younger than Ryuko.

Really. He is *younger* in probably just about every sense of the word, because as much as Senketsu may try to coach Ryuko, he's got absolutely zero life experience—and a lot of the series is him figuring stuff out *with* her.

I don't know if we should count the episode previews that Senketsu narrates as canon to his character (I totally do, but that's me), but episode 13's extended preview¹ is great when it comes to this. Senketsu's being his usual know-it-all self, pointing out that a lot of the cast is immature... and then he gets to the end and realizes, oh no, he's immature himself!

And going off of actual in-series events, the coaching and the advice and the know-it-all-ness honestly has a lot to do with what he is and what he was designed for. He was built as support for Ryuko, so in the early episodes, that's exactly what he does... bluntly, and pretty dispassionately. He warns Ryuko about losing too much blood, warns that Satsuki is stronger than they are, etc, etc, but the *way* this is done doesn't point to "wise older mentor figure" to me. It's more like, well, some unfeeling robot/AI/warning system. He's not advising Ryuko based off of any past experience—he has none. He's just rattling off about statistics and facts that he can read from her.

But what makes Senketsu a compelling character is that he becomes more "human" as the series progresses. He pretty much stops with the lectures and deadpan Ryuko-analyzing once you get past episode 5, which, as it would happen, is the episode all about how he's more than a uniform and where he first really sees himself as Ryuko's friend. After that, when he's worried about Ryuko, he, slowly but surely, actually *expresses* that instead of just commenting about how she ought to be careful or whatnot. You especially see this in the latter half of the series, where he gets so overwhelmed by emotions that he spends a lot of his screen time crying. I'll also point to fourth Drama CD, which is absolutely filled to the brim with Senketsu emotionally fretting about Ryuko and even has Aikuro acting fatherly towards him².

tl;dr Senketsu isn't some bitter old man who has to relearn what love is or some sad old dude who never experienced it in all his life until the series and is filled with horrible past memories and resentment, but a dorky teenager like Ryuko who's figuring out who he is and the world around him and this wonderful thing called friendship.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on February 15, 2015, as a response to carcinocarnival's post on the topic (see 3 below)

URL:

<http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/111118277430/carcinocarnivals-a-friendly-reminder-that>

Additional commentary: In another post, I discussed the complaints that Senketsu was “miscast” in English because he “sounds too young”:

...yes, Vincent's portrayal of Senketsu certainly does come off as younger than Seki's, but. . . I don't think that's a bad thing. Having Senketsu sound more like a teenager than an adult still works for his character.

Because, I mean... Senketsu kinda *is* something of a teenager. He's young and inexperienced (less than a year old!) and doesn't know who he is or what he's meant to do with his life. He certainly tries to act all wise and profound, but he'll even admit to you that despite all that, he's actually pretty immature.

What Seki's performance does is create a sort of duality. Senketsu sounds older and wiser than Ryuko, and he enjoys acting like he is, too. But he's not. They're both young, they're both learning together, and they're both on the same level. With Vincent as Senketsu, you do lose the funny contrast, but I think it still fits. It just further emphasizes Senketsu's naivety and newness to everything.

And yeah, sure. I woulda loved if we got someone like Logan Cunningham (AKA, the voice in *Transistor*) to do Senketsu in English, sounding all deep and wise ~~and sexy~~. But I also like the focus on Senketsu's youth that we get with David Vincent, because I think that's a part of him that's often overlooked.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uILfolIhVA>
2. <http://mikiryuko.tumblr.com/post/110184189495/mikiryuko-h0saki-senketsu-is-carrying-the>
3. <http://carcinocarnivals.tumblr.com/post/110937146075/a-friendly-reminder-that-senketsu-is-actually>

Anonymous asked: Hello ! I read (almost) all your analysis and they are perfect! Only after reading your analysis of the age of Senketsu, I wonder if you could give an exact age. 17 years as Ryuko?

Holy moly anon, that's a lot of analyses! I'm really flattered... and impressed! Thank you!

On the question of Senketsu's age, it's... a little complicated. Physically, he can't be much older than a year, if that; he was born six months before the start of the series, and the show likely only covers around that much time as well. When you consider that he was *unconscious* for probably half his life, he's really only been living a handful of months at best. He's extremely, incredibly young.

But he clearly doesn't have the mental capacity of an infant, and here's where it gets complicated. How old is Senketsu *really*? How old is he mentally and emotionally, where you might argue is where it truly matters?

From what I understand, mental age refers to intelligence. There's even a fancy formula for calculating it: Your IQ = your mental age/your chronological age x 100. Of course, I have no way of knowing Senketsu's IQ, but from what's given in the series, it's probably pretty high. He seems rather "programmed" with a lot of knowledge, and has the ability to read, write, strategize, and so on all at the same level as his partner Ryuko, if not better.

It's probably pretty evident from my *Kill la Kill* blog that I am not fond of the reading of Senketsu as a father figure or mentor for Ryuko (after all, I literally have a whole section for discussing this on the analyses page...), but I understand that it's not unfounded. Senketsu is smart! He's full of analyzing, plotting, examinations... heck, in the first Drama CD, he even studies for a test in place of Ryuko. He can be a bit of a know-it-all, and likes to act like he knows what's best about everything.

But intelligence and knowledge? It doesn't necessarily equate to maturity, and with literally no life experience to speak of, Senketsu may not be as mature as he thinks he is. As mentioned previously, he actually explicitly points this out in the extended preview for episode 13¹, realizing that even though he's criticizing other characters for being immature, in all actuality, *he's* also pretty immature himself.

Which makes sense, and is part of why I love his character so much! You can't expect someone who's never been in the world to just automatically *know* how to behave, and Senketsu doesn't know. When the

series begins, he struggles getting through to Ryuko, he doesn't really understand what is and isn't acceptable, he's bad at communicating and expressing his own emotions, and he constantly undermines his own significance. Even later on, he has no idea how to react or what to say when Ryuko learns the truth of what she is, and how could he? His life has been so short that he can hardly comprehend what she's going through.

I see *Kill la Kill* as a story of these two growing together. It's hard for me to really pinpoint what Senketsu's "actual" age is, but such a huge aspect of the series is this fact that he and Ryuko are *equals*. Maybe he's smarter than her and more responsible than her, but he certainly doesn't have the life experience she does, and they're both seeking who they are and where they belong. They both learn a lot from each other, and through being together.

I guess, when I get down to it, I don't think I can really say if Senketsu has the mind of a 17-year-old like Ryuko or not. His mental age is probably that of an adult, but emotionally? He's going through the same kinda stuff that your average teen or young adult is. So, personally? I consider him in the same peer group as Ryuko even if I can't exactly tie down his "age," which he seems to do as well; after all, when considering who is his "type" in the long preview for episode 11², he only considers the girls he goes to school with—Ryuko, Satsuki, Mako, and Nonon.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on December 31, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/136320180515/hello-i-read-almost-all-your-analysis-and-they>

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uILfollhVA>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIbXZAdNGPo>

SHIPPING NAMES

In hiragana, Ryuko's name is written as りゅうこ (ryu-u-ko), which is represented by two characters in kanji: 流 (ryuu) and 子 (ko).

The kanji 流 can have a few meanings, but the big one is **flow** (naga+re), which is why Google Translate likes to “translate” Ryuko's name as “Nagareko.” The kanji 子 is the kanji for **child**.

Senketsu's name is せんけつ (se-n-ke-tsu) in hiragana and 鮮血 in kanji. As the second episode tells us, “senketsu” means “fresh blood.” The kanji 鮮 (sen) is a character for **fresh** and the kanji 血 (ketsu) represents **blood**.

So, with a name like Fresh Blood, when we start shipping and making portmanteau ship names, the meanings can...get a little funny.

Take Ryuketsu, for instance. In kanji, this is 流血—“flowing blood,” which is more accurately translated as “bloodshed.” The other popular name is Senryu, 鮮流. Together, these two kanji don't make an actual Japanese word like Ryuketsu, but if you've ever seen Senryu also tagged with “fresh flow,” it's due to this fact that the ship name combines the kanji for “fresh” and “flow.” And just for funsies, though it breaks the typical standards of shipping names, there's also Ketsuryu, 血流, which means “blood flow.”

Keeping the pronunciation the same but using different characters can create other meanings, too. Senryu, when written with the kanji 川 (**river**) and 柳 (**willow**), refers to a type of haiku that predominates the Senryu tag on Tumblr. Ryuketsu, when written with the kanji 竜 (**dragon**) and the same 血 (**blood**) from Senketsu, means “dragon's blood.” Dragon's blood is a bright red resin that can be found in the *Dracaena draco* tree, which is why adding the character 樹 (**tree**) at the end of 竜血 refers to the plant, which is also known as the “dragon's blood tree.”

There doesn't seem to be a consensus (?) on the “official” ship name for Ryuko and Senketsu, so Ryuketsu or Senryu? Personally, I like to go with Ryuketsu, because c'mon, there's just something darkly amusing about saying that you ship Bloodshed.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on April 16, 2014

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/82928573159/on-ryukosenketsu-ship-names>

Additional commentary: In the years since this was first written, Google Translate has changed. It now actually likes to “translate” Ryuko’s name as “commutator.”

THE “ONLY ONE”

Ryuko is commonly defined as something of an immature character. Her being such is utilized as an insult by Satsuki as early as episode 3, and stated via narration by Senketsu in a preview for episode 13 (though, he admits his own immaturity as well).

It’s easy to think, then, that she is a child who can’t take care of herself, and who needs someone constantly looking over her shoulder and telling her what to do. She’s not ready to be on her own—and won’t be until she grows up a little.

And yet, in all actuality, Ryuko’s immaturity stems from the *opposite* problem. She has been living on her own for years, essentially abandoned as a child. After her father’s death, she’s able to get by without him, seemingly with ease. She’s used to being by herself, and used to fending for herself. She knows very much how to be independent and alone.

What she *doesn’t* know is how to not push people away, how to ask for help when she needs it, and how to let people in. It’s why statements about characters creeping into her heart mean so much. She’s a loner, in the beginning, someone who secretly yearns for love but is hesitant to reach out for it, actively keeping her distance from a certain bubbly girl, yet jumping into friendship at the slightest prodding when it comes to the seeming-ally Maiko Ogure. Even when she begins to warm up to the family that takes her in, she spends a great while still keeping a lot to herself. What she really thinks and feels are often hidden behind declarations of being fine and angry outbursts, and to let her guard down and reveal these things—to let people into her heart—is a big deal.

So when Ryuko, feeling a bit awkward and uncomfortable after being brought into little more than a stranger’s home in episode 2, decides to whisper to her new companion Senketsu and try to converse with him about what’s happening to them rather than sleep, it means a lot. When a giant, action-packed, adrenaline-fueled battle hinges on her opening her heart to him in episode 3, it’s huge. When she has a nightmare about losing him in episode 4, and wakes up screaming his name, you know there’s already something *here*, something important, something that says that this loner really *cares* about this person. When there’s a need for Mako to remind Ryuko that Senketsu isn’t her only friend, that she can let other people in, too, and a whole song on the OST that reflects this in the form of “Light your heart up,”

it's clear that this relationship goes deep. When Ryuko reveals her backstory to Senketsu in a gentle scene in the start of episode 7 before telling anyone else, when she can't bring herself to admit her fear of herself after losing control to her family in episode 13 yet can to him, when she quiets before him and says she's scared, she's worried, after an angry declaration that covered up such feelings in episode 17, when she yells and screams at everyone but shows Senketsu the tears in her eyes after learning her true nature in episode 20... you know. This person has come into her heart, somehow. She's opened herself up to him.

There's a common argument, in *Kill la Kill* discussion, that Mako is the only one who can calm Ryuko, and the only one who can reach her heart. And it is incomplete. In a shining moment of true love saving the day, *two* characters literally and metaphorically break into Ryuko's heart, crashing a fake fantasy wedding to free her from Junketsu, and it is both Mako *and* Senketsu.

In *Kill la Kill*, there is no “only one” who saves their friend with love. There is no “only one” to bring them out of monster mode, no “only one” who can calm them when they go berserk, because the overarching message of the show is literally the cheesiest, corniest, most wondrous *shounen* message of all: the power of friendship.

And here, that means *all* friendship, *not* just the lovey-dovey stuff.

And that's pretty cool. Why neglect Senketsu and neglect this, when we are so filled with stories that say, over and over again, that only romantic love is the strongest of all?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 28, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/145045521790/ryuko-is-commonly-defined-as-something-of-an>

SPECEFIC MOMENTS

EPISODE 5: “I’M HERE.”

It’s a small thing, really, but the part where Senketsu assures Ryuko, “*I’m here*” after she wakes up screaming for him at the end of episode 5 always gets to me. It really, really stings.

So much of this story is about Ryuko and Senketsu being with one another. “I had to do *something* to get the two of you together,” Aikuro says in episode 3. Episode 4 has a B-plot gag about the Mankanshoku boys trying to get Senketsu back to Ryuko and messing up a billion times along the way. Whenever they get separated—whether it’s a psychological separation, as in episode 13 when Ryuko is forlorn and distraught over her actions that led to her going berserk against Nui, or a physical separation, as when Senketsu is torn up at the end of 13, or when Ryuko leaves him at the start of episode 20 upon learning her true nature—the plot dedicates itself to bringing them back together. There is no narrative here about how they’re better off alone, or that they’re no good for each other. The message is, unambiguously, *They belong together*.

And they *want* to be. Ryuko says in episode 22 that she “ain’t gonna take Senketsu off ever again.” She has a recurring nightmare about losing him, where he’s torn to bits and crying for help, and wakes up multiple times throughout the series screaming his name. She’s horribly, terribly afraid of a day where he’s *not* there, where she *won’t* look down and see him, where she *won’t* hear his voice assuring her that he’s with her.

Senketsu, meanwhile, also blatantly says that he wants to be with Ryuko when he tells her that it’s his wish to be worn by her in episode 13, and he is a character rather defined by his loyalty. Though it may be more for show than anything, Ryuko makes a good point in episode 16 when she rages at Nudist Beach that it’s not fair to force Senketsu into a world-saving battle without asking *his* feelings about it. He really has no reason to stick with Ryuko and fight this fight with her. He could take blood from anyone, be the monster that so many think he is. But he doesn’t do any of that. He sincerely cares for Ryuko, and is practically the only one in the series who doesn’t toy with her, betray her, or abandon her in some sense; after all, Ryuko is left alone by her father, tricked and used by her sister and the Elite Four, abandoned and betrayed by Mako and her family when they grow rich and greedy, used by Maiko, toyed with by Aikuro and Nudist Beach (to the point where Ryuko thinks that Aikuro knew everything about her and was just

laughing at her for being a “freak” the entire time)... but never Senketsu. He stays by her side, always.

So what we end up with are these two characters who we’re told constantly *should be together*, who both desire to always stay that way, where one is horribly afraid of a time when they’re not and the other wants more than anything to be with her no matter the hardships and battles that even *she* thinks he shouldn’t have to take part in... and the conclusion of their story has them torn apart. Ryuko’s worst fear, her terrible nightmare—it comes true. The one who never left her finally does. When she looks down to smile at him, to say, in essence, “You know me better than anyone,” in a scrapped piece of the OVA¹, she finds that he’s not there. There is no one to reassure her anymore.

Senketsu was apparently planned to die² from one of the earliest drafts of the show, and even in a very early script for episode 1³, there’s this thread of Senketsu assuring Ryuko, “*I’m right here,*” and that she needn’t be afraid. So when I see this sentiment reflected in the actual episode 5 (and to a lesser extent, episode 14, when Ryuko wakes up screaming for Senketsu and hears his voice assuring her that he’s not gone), it all feels to me like this really heartbreaking, deliberate way of emphasizing that Senketsu *won’t* always be there with Ryuko. “Death flags,” as it’s termed.

It gets to me.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on September 18, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/129396476485/its-a-small-thing-really-but-this-part-where>

Tags: #and then apparently his death is 'for the best' #does anyone say that about mufasa dying in the lion king #or bambi's mom #or gwen stacy #or to go the cheesy romance route #does anyone say that about jack dying in the titanic #senketsu and ryuko wanted to be together so much and they grew together so much #like i'm sorry but his death is in no way 'for the best' for ryuko...

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/122609360145/h0saki-iorishiro-ok-so-in-the-kill-la-kill>
2. <http://sushiobunny.tumblr.com/post/97595928890/some-information-from-the-kill-la-kill-compre>
3. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/128295519009/these-are-the-scripts-for-the-earliest-version-of>

EPISODE 7: SMALL DETAILS

The things you notice when making gifs...

So, opening to episode 7. This scene's really one of my favorites—Ryuko's just finished eating dinner with her family, and she's eagerly letting Senketsu know how much it means to her. She even reveals some never-before-heard information about her past: her mother died when she was young, and her father sent her away to a boarding school not long after.

And I love that Ryuko opens up to him and what that means, but when editing this scene, I noticed something. When Ryuko says that her mother died, Senketsu narrows his eye:



Very small detail, absolutely, but I love it. With Senketsu being a sailor uniform, I think it's often easy to forget that he's (usually) always with Ryuko, and that he's actively taking part in a lot of what happens in the show. Though Senketsu doesn't feature too heavily in this particular episode, I see it as pretty good at always maintaining that Senketsu *is* there. When Ryuko's alone, she's not really—Senketsu wonders what's so funny when she laughs to herself, and he talks to her when everyone else has left. Midway through the episode, when we see Ryuko and Mako going to sleep in their new beds, the story doesn't forget to show Senketsu's new "bed," too. (And just look at that bunny hanger!)



This episode also likes to have fun showing Senketsu's expressions in the background, or in freeze frames:





Tiny, tiny, *tiny* things, but it all furthers the idea that Senketsu is *there*.

Bringing this back to the opening scene, I love the care given to animate Senketsu's reaction to Ryuko's words because no matter how subtle it is, it helps point out that Ryuko's not just talking to herself—she's talking to a *person*, and he thinks about what she says and takes it to heart. This actually becomes important in the narrative sense for this episode. Because Ryuko told Senketsu how much family dinners mean to her at the start, he has increased understanding and motivation to help her reach the decision to quit Fight Club so she can have them back.

As a final note, I also find his narrowing of his eye here curious. Does Ryuko not really buy that her mother died, and Senketsu can feel that? Is he just concerned about her because she's revealing such personal information? Again, such a small thing, but I just can't help but find it fascinating...

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 26, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125120808790/the-things-you-notice-when-making-gifs-so>

Additional commentary: Yeah, Trigger *does* like to play with “matching expressions” with clothing quite a bit. You get similar situations with Nonon's Nudist Beach hat matching her, and Nico's hair accessories doing the same in *Kiznaiver*.

Still, Senketsu *is* alive and sentient, so while this kind of thing might typically be nothing more than cute animation details, it rather adds character in his case.

At least, I'd argue so.

EPISODE 8: SILENT SYNCHRONIZATION



This little sequence from episode 8 when Ryuko revisits her old house is pretty fascinating.

For one, Ryuko and Senketsu transform without any vocal indication that they're going to. There's no, "Let's do this, Senketsu!", no "Life Fiber Synchronize!", no nothing. Just silence, sparkles, and wham, they're synchronized. And while this does happen in the episode right before, too...



...it's during a battle, where they're both getting hurt. Getting synced up is the obvious, logical course of action. They don't have to think about it because they both know what they have to do.

But here? In episode 8? Ryuko never tells Senketsu what she's planning, and yet somehow, he just *knows*. Small moment as this is, it's a really wonderful representation of how far Ryuko and Senketsu have come as partners—and a good contrast with Satsuki and Senketsu's team up in episode 21. There, Satsuki has to shout out all her attacks so Senketsu will understand what she wants, and it's also clear that he *doesn't* particularly know what she's thinking, finding her tactics “interesting” because they surprise him. Their synchronization is described as “makeshift” and “flimsy,” and it's moments like this one at Ryuko's house that really showcase *why*. Ryuko often doesn't have to say a word for Senketsu to get what's going through her head, which is something that only becomes clearer as the series progresses.

This house scene is also kinda funny because it implies that the glove isn't really necessary to transform at all (especially if Senketsu knows when she wants to), but Ryuko keeps using it anyway. Probably because she thinks it looks cool.

But the funniest thing about it that I only noticed after flipping through the episode to do some Writing on the show is Mako's expression upon seeing the transformed Ryuko and Senketsu:



“You guys are doing THAT, right now, in front of me?!”

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 17, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/144500181890/this-little-sequence-from-episode-8-when-ryuko>

EPISODE 10: “IT FEELS LIKE HE’S STRIPPING US DOWN.”

Anonymous asked: Anyone else find it amusing/ironic that at the beginning of Ryuko's fight with Inumuta, Senketsu makes a remark about being made nervous as if HE is the one being stripped naked (instead of Ryuko XD)? It seems ironic for him to be nervous about that, don't you think? (It is an offhand remark to be sure, but still.)

I find this line actually really fascinating.

The purpose of Ryuko and Senketsu’s exchange right before the fight seems to be that Houka is someone who battles more through wit and analysis than brute strength. Ryuko doesn’t seem to find his uniform all that impressive, but Senketsu notes that even if it doesn’t look powerful in itself, it’s still intimidating because of its capabilities—it’s almost like they’re being taken out from the *inside* with the way Houka is examining them.

From what I can tell, the Japanese dialogue isn’t especially clear if Senketsu is referring to just himself when he makes the “stripped naked” comment or *both* him and Ryuko; the official subtitles use “I,” but the English dub has him say instead, “It feels like he’s stripping *us* down.” Either way, though, it’s pretty funny not only because of the obvious, “Well, how do you think Ryuko feels when she wears you, huh?,” but also because the underlying meaning here: Senketsu is basically getting a taste of his own medicine. He’s *constantly* analyzing and examining Ryuko. How does it feel to be on the other end of that sort of behavior? He doesn’t like it!

Also to consider is the title of this episode—“I Want to Know More About You”—and what’s included in Senketsu’s preview¹ for it:

Senketsu: To be skilled at research is to be skilled at love. Research the opponent, and input all data! To be skilled at analysis is to be skilled at love. Read what the opponent’s thinking and expect what’ll happen next. There’s a thin line between it and stalking. No, it’s not true. Love and war are similar things!

What this means to me? Senketsu seems to see his analyzing and examining of Ryuko as loving. And isn’t it? He’s certainly looking out for her wellbeing when he does it. But then he reaches a realization: Actually... maybe this is kinda creepy. (Like stalking.) I’ve written many times of

Senketsu doing less of the deadpan Ryuko-analyzing as the series progresses, but perhaps a part of that is because he comes to understand that it's super uncomfortable to be subjected to that sort of thing after his and Ryuko's battle with Houka. After all, moving on from here, Senketsu takes Ryuko's feelings far more into consideration, and actually expresses his own.

This isn't really explored too thoroughly in the show itself, but it's certainly fun to think about. And to go even further? Here's a little something more:

This episode (10) starts with a flashback of Houka first meeting Satsuki. He hacks into the REVOCS site, gets caught, and decides to join her. It's a good bit of much-needed backstory.

But consider the song playing in the background. It's the first section (until about the 1:30 mark) of “Ki ㄣ 9=KELL”², a song that, though it plays multiple times over the course of the show³, has *this* particular section only come up twice: this flashback sequence at the start of this episode, and Ryuko's flashback to first meeting Senketsu in episode 2.

So not only do we have these Houka/Senketsu comparisons that you can make with how they both are very analytical, but they both also meet the most important woman in their lives to the same tune. Significantly, this meeting alters the course of their entire lives, filling them with a sense of purpose. As Houka's section⁴ of the Elite Four Light novel reveals:

But upon [Houka's] encounter with Kiryuin Satsuki, he realized that he was only an Emperor with No Clothes. Behind cyberspace—what he thought to be the entire world—there lay a Truth about a world he didn't know of. Satsuki had challenged that Truth to battle, and aimed to change it. For the first time since he was born, he felt a powerful emotion. He was trembling with fear, yet at the same time elated. He was shocked to experience such an animalistic, raw emotion within himself.

It was intriguing. It was unbearably intriguing, and with this intrigue in front of him, he felt ALIVE for the first time. And since Kiryuin Satsuki had infused him with this new “life,” of course he must devote his new “living” self towards understanding everything about her. For Inumuta Houka, this was the logical conclusion.

So, basically? Satsuki fills Houka with life, and consequently—like the

episode title states—he “Wants to Know More About Her.” She becomes his drive.

Similarly, Ryuko *literally* gives Senketsu life. It’s her DNA that gives him his humanity, and her blood that wakes him up. And if his early behavior around Ryuko is indicative of anything, it’s that he, much like Houka, wants to understand everything about her. He monitors her constantly and wants to know her. Toshihiko Seki, Senketsu’s Japanese voice actor, makes this point himself⁵, and brings it all back around to this idea of “love” that Senketsu talks about in his episode 10 preview:

Toshihiko Seki: I think that a person’s foremost wish is to “know one’s self.” Ryuko and Senketsu both said to each other, “I want to know you.” I think it cheapens things to put this into words, but it is “love.”

Adding even *more* to all this, episode 10 is part of an episode arc—the Naturals Election arc, to be specific—that is *all about* Ryuko and Senketsu learning more about each other. They gain new abilities in the form of Senketsu Senjin and Senketsu Shippu, learn to better communicate with each other and plan their battles, and become much more powerful.

Are these things purely coincidental? Probably to an extent; though Satsuki’s relationships with her Elite Four are directly compared to Ryuko’s relationships with Senketsu and Mako in episode 22, these specific Houka/Senketsu similarities... are likely largely unintentional. But still, as I said before, I think these things are definitely fun to explore. I’m personally really drawn to how Houka meets Satsuki and Senketsu meets Ryuko to arguably the most whimsical, fantastical (part of a) song on the entire *Kill la Kill* soundtrack—one that’s definitely among my top favorite pieces!

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 20, 2015, with additional commentary added December 8, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/134782224060/anyone-else-find-it-amusingironic-that-at-the>

Additional commentary: I realize in retrospect that it may be more accurate to say that Houka is *led* to meet Satsuki to the same tune as the Ryuko and Senketsu scene, as, by the time they're actually *meeting* personally, the music has changed.

Still, I can't help but be drawn to the connection, because these two instances are the *only* two times this part of the song ever plays.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TcCimFh1dc>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwbgvsAJkUw>
3. <http://pastebin.com/7bC8H7S5>
4. https://www.reddit.com/r/KillLaKill/comments/1xsznb/elite_4_in_uz_u_sanageyama/
5. <http://pastebin.com/DRSthFfY>

EPISODE 15: "SENKETSU AND I ARE TWO IN ONE."



See this scene? *Let me tell you about this scene.*

A little background. Right before those frames up there, Ryuko and Satsuki have this exchange:

Ryuko: Kiryuin, maybe it's true you mastered that Junketsu of yours. But you're alone.

Satsuki: And you're not?

Then we get what Ryuko's saying here. "No. Senketsu and I are two in one." And obviously this is a great moment for Ryuko and Senketsu and their relationship (and goodness knows I could write on and on about *that*), but when it's all screenshotted out like this, what probably takes up the bulk of your attention is Mako. Who you may take one look at and be quick to call Ryuko out for being "cruel" and for "forgetting" her, because Mako looks offended. Hurt. Not-so-happy.

But that's missing the point. What's really happening with Mako is that she's coming to a *realization* with that last startled frame there. After fifteen episodes of not getting it, she finally sees that Senketsu means far more to Ryuko than just being her only outfit.

Because *of course* Ryuko's not alone in the sense that she has Mako and Mako's family, and of course Satsuki's not alone in that she's got her whole Elite Four backing her up.

Satsuki *is* alone, though, in that she's not working with Junketsu as Ryuko is with Senketsu. This whole arc from episodes 14-15 is about Ryuko screwing her revenge quest and putting Senketsu first. Ryuko wins this fight (or makes it to a draw) because she puts her faith in Senketsu and they work together. As Aikuro says in episode 6, they are "true partners." He's not a weapon or just her "precious only set," but an equal and a friend.

Why I love these screenshots up there so much? Because Mako's finally *getting* that. Because before this, Mako *didn't* understand Senketsu, and she sure as pie didn't understand his relationship with Ryuko, either.

Just look at their history. Back in episode 4, Mako teases Ryuko about Senketsu:

Mako: "Senketsu"? What's that? No way, did you give your uniform a name? Boy, you must be really lonely!

And though by episode 5 she's a lot more understanding, she still defines their relationship as one between a severely lonely girl and her only outfit rather than as a relationship between a severely lonely girl and a great partner who genuinely cares about her:

Mako: Ryuko loves this uniform more than anything! She's always whispering to it. Pretty creepy, huh? My whole family is creeped out by it! **But that's what people who only own one set of clothes are like!**

Emphasis added. In Mako's eyes, Ryuko is so lonely that she values even her only set of clothes as a "friend," oblivious to the fact that Senketsu is alive and loves Ryuko just as much as she does. This is why the end of the episode has Ryuko reassuring Senketsu that he's not *just* clothing, but someone who cares about her, and yes, a true companion.

Come episode 6, Mako tells Mataro that she thinks it "fine" that Ryuko talks to Senketsu so much, for a reason I chalk up to her relating to Ryuko. Mako only had friends in her head once, so she probably knows what it's like to be so lonely that you're talking to things that aren't real—or in this case, seem to be just an inanimate object. Basically, I'd say that she pretty much humors Ryuko, though in a much nicer way.

Then episode 14 happens. Ryuko is superpowered and full of resolve to save Senketsu, and Mako says:

Mako: Oh, I get it, Ryuko. You're going to these lengths 'cause he's your only uniform.

And even here, she's *still* not seeing Senketsu as anything more than an object Ryuko talks to out of loneliness.

But we reach episode 15 and that scene up there happens. And she gets it. Ryuko's not "going to those lengths" because Senketsu is her only uniform, but because she and Senketsu are "two in one" and freaking partners to the end.

For the first time, Mako considers Senketsu's humanity. Which, sadly, makes sense. You go into *Kill la Kill* and you don't expect much from a talking shirt. You expect a cute mascot character with the personality of a piece of cardboard, used only as a tool by the protagonist to win battles. That's pretty much what I expected.

I was wrong. And Mako? She just didn't *get* it. Until this scene. Which

the show goes out of its way to make clear with her blushing and blushing *loudly*, as if telling you, the viewer, that you better understand this, too!

No, Senketsu is not a “swooningly sexy” sort of dude. No, he’s not exactly “human,” either. But none of that should undermine the fact that he’s as much as a character as anybody else is, that he loves and supports the protagonist as much as Mako and Mako’s family do, and that he deserves to be treated as such.

Best of all? After this scene, Mako becomes the biggest supporter of Ryuko and Senketsu’s relationship. Once she gets it she freaking *gets it* and she defends them every chance she gets—often throwing herself into harm’s way in the process. In the finale, she even wills herself to move under Absolute Submission in order to speak out on their behalf.

More specifically here, in episode 17, Mako breaks up a fight between Ryuko and Tsumugu by reminding Ryuko about how much she cares for Senketsu:

Mako: After all, the reason you wear Senketsu is because you love him best, right?

In episode 20, Ryuko’s most upset because she feels like a monster, but Mako focuses only on how Ryuko can’t treat Senketsu like she is. While this probably only serves to make Ryuko feel *worse*—she likely feels like she doesn’t even deserve love, after all—Mako cares so much for their relationship at this point that when Ryuko has this “We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together” moment with Senketsu, she finds it so wrong that she can’t talk about anything else:

Mako: He will cling to you! I mean, Senketsu is your best friend and your Sunday best! He’s going to cling to you forever and ever, just like some outfit that’s full of static electricity!

By the finale, she literally throws herself right in front of Nui Harime to defend Ryuko and Senketsu—showing that she’s willing to *die* to protect this ~~ship~~ partnership they share:



Mako: I mean, with Ryuko and Senketsu, neither one of them is the boss! They have a lovely partnership between human and clothing!

So that one scene up there, and what it represents for Mako? I see it as pretty stinkin' significant. Because here we have a character like Senketsu who is so commonly dismissed by nature of being a talking shirt, but Mako realizes, as the viewer does, that this "talking shirt" is just as "human" as anybody else is, and that he and Ryuko love each other, which should be respected no matter what he looks like.

~~(Now if only the show remembered that in the ending...)~~

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 12, 2014, as a response to miracle-interrupter-heno's screenshots of the scene (see 1 below)

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/91591970110/miracle-interrupter-heno-see-this-scene>

1. <http://miracle-interrupter-heno.tumblr.com/post/91126113799>

EPISODE 16: RYUKO'S CHAIR-THROWING SEQUENCE

Ryuko's chair-throwing sequence in episode 16 is a wonderful bit of animation. And while I love that so many people have acknowledged this, I think it's just as important to understand *why* it's as good as it is.

I find this worth bringing up because a lot of times, I see this whole thing treated almost as a gag. Ryuko's just throwing a tantrum in a fit of petty, ridiculous teenage rage, and—as tantrums tend to be—it's funny. She's overreacting, and so is the animation itself. It's dynamic and fluid and absolutely top-notch when Ryuko's just having a hissy fit. While the contrast can be said to create humor, I'm sure I'm not the only one who's seen bemused reactions to it. *This* is where the staff is putting all their time and energy? Ryuko angrily throwing a chair for comedy?

But I think that point right there is the answer. While other animation studios might over-animate ridiculous, nonsensical sequences for the sake of humor, that doesn't really seem to be Trigger's style. (I mean, just look at *Inferno Cop*.) And in fact, this concept of animation quality and humor is something that director Hiroyuki Imaishi seems to be quite passionate about. In the *Kill la Kill* "Making Documentary" DVD 1, there's a whole segment where he discusses this. He had just redrawn one of Mako's Hallelujah sequences, writing a note of "Sorry" to the key animator who had originally drawn it:

Interviewer: You wrote, "Sorry..."

Imaishi: Well, because he worked so hard on it and I didn't use it. "Sorry."

Interviewer: What was the problem?

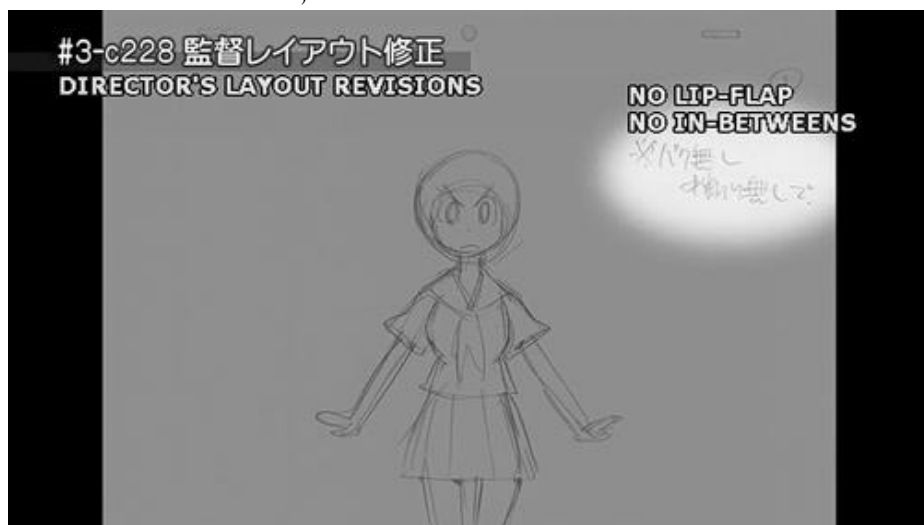
Imaishi: There was too much movement, so it was a good problem to have.

Interviewer: Too much movement?

Imaishi: Too much movement. It was something you shouldn't put all that effort into. If there's too much of a sense of exertion, then you

lose that sense of it being a gag. It doesn't come off as funny... Animation-wise, they should move in a kind of goofy way, then you mix in some totally smooth moves once in a while. That's the kind of tempo it should have. Like Mako's hand gestures here... These scenes where she gestures as she talks... They bring the overall flow of the story to a halt, and it goes off in one oddball direction, then comes right back. That's the kind of gap I'm looking for, so having a staggering piece of brilliant artwork there doesn't work, actually.

So, in other words? Imaishi feels strongly that a gag shouldn't be animated all that fluidly, with only bursts of smoothness between silly still images. Otherwise, it all looks too beautiful and serious and it loses any sense of humor it's supposed to have. In this particular instance, he noted this right on the page—no lip flaps, and no in-betweens. That sort of effort isn't needed for the sake of a joke.



Bringing this all back to the chair-throwing scene, then, I think it's safe to say that this is *not* a gag in the slightest. The whole thing is animated beautifully from start to finish, and oh man do I mean it. Just look at all that *motion*:



I mean, *dang*.

The main takeaway here is that we're not supposed to be laughing at Ryuko or thinking that she's just throwing some petty tantrum; rather, we should be engaged in what she's saying because what she's riled up about is something that truly, sincerely matters. The animation is so well-done because the show wants you to take serious note of her words and her feelings, not because we're supposed to find these things funny.

Which is absolutely justified! If *Kill la Kill*'s about anything, it's about friendship, and this moment has everything to do with that. While Ryuko's upset on many levels in this scene, the real heart of it is how nobody's respecting or treating Senketsu justly. She's just learned that he was born solely to kill others of his own kind, and while everyone else expects him to go with it without question, she won't stand for it. He's *not* just some tool or a weapon—he's her best friend, and he has a mind and feelings of his own that should be given the recognition deserved. When Ryuko throws the

chair, *this* is what she wants everyone to know. And there's nothing silly or petty about that.

So there's a good reason why so much time and effort went into this sequence. You could say practically this whole show is about Ryuko gaining friends and people she can call her family, and when it comes to Senketsu, it's their friendship that even allows so much of the plot to exist at all, since it's their teamwork that wins all the fights, and—at the end of it—saves the world. So to have this big moment depicting how much Ryuko values Senketsu like this absolutely deserves the animation quality that screams it's important. After all, Ryuko gets some of the most detailed dialogue animation you'll ever see in the series right after this, as though to say, "What she's talking about is huge, and you'd better listen!"

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 5, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/123353053855/ryukos-chair-throwing-sequence-here-is-a>

EPISODE 17: “THAT’S THE KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE.”





Episode 17 is probably most known for Satsuki's shocking backstab against her mother in the end, and I'm not going to deny that this is an incredible, huge moment. Absolutely!

But perhaps what stands out to me just as much are the touching character moments in this episode. Satsuki's conversation with her butler Soroi near the beginning is a wonderfully humanizing scene for her—and one of my favorite parts of the show, period. Mako's parents worrying over Ryuko as though she's their own means so much with the understanding that Ryuko's never had much of a family at all, and it hits even harder when Ryuko then worries over *them* in the same way.

This scene I gifed here is another example. It's not big and exciting and thrilling, but I still find it so incredibly memorable because it's such a good moment between Ryuko and Senketsu. For a girl who tends to hide how she really feels behind yelling and a cocky attitude, it's *huge* to see her drop all that in front of someone and admit, *Hey, I guess I'm really just scared*.

The previous episode before this ends with Ryuko risking her life, saying that it's solely for Senketsu's sake. She'll die for him, to prevent him from simply being used as a tool and a weapon, from fighting when he has no need to. It's... a bit unclear—and up to your own interpretation—how much of this is actually true. While Ryuko certainly values Senketsu immensely, she's *also* being forced into something unfairly. Come the scene featured in this gifset, she confesses:

Ryuko: This whole thing's got me freaked out.

Senketsu: Why?

Ryuko: I don't know... it's like, everything's gone from a stupid fight to this crazy war that's over my head. People are sayin' things like, "fate of humanity" and "extinction of our species" and blah blah. My head was spinning, and I wanted to say, "I don't give a crap!" Instead, I used you as an excuse to get angry.

Is she just being selfish? Does she really care about Senketsu that much at all? She's unsure, and scared. But—and this is *huge*—she doesn't keep these fears to herself. *She lets Senketsu in.*

I noted in my original tags for the gifset that Senketsu is "telling [Ryuko] that she's a good person who is sweet and kind and cares about others." And, sure. I personally subscribe to the reading that she *was* truly angry for his sake, and Senketsu knows her so well that he understands this, too, but honestly—it's never really made clear one way or another what was actually happening. Maybe Ryuko *was* just being selfish and scared in her defense of Senketsu. But even so, this scene is all about her being open with him. It's her biggest insecurity that she's no good for anyone and will only hurt them, so for Senketsu to assure her that no matter what, she *is* a good person, that she *is* good for him... that's powerful.

What's crucial in a moment like this is that it's a *conversation*. Ryuko is not talking to a wall about her feelings, but a *person*, and this person is very important to her and who she trusts with the deepest parts of herself! Call me petty, but it breaks my heart when I make sets like these and I see character tags like "ryuko" or "mako" or "my wife," but Senketsu is ignored completely. This is a really heartfelt moment between them, no matter how you interpret it, and *that's* what I intended to show with my edit. Not that Ryuko is badass, not that she throws a chair next to Mako and it's funny, but that she has a really wonderful friendship with Senketsu that I'd love to see appreciated more.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 25, 2015, as a self-reblog addressing the misinterpretations and confusion concerning a gifset I had made

URL:

<http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/127607360087/marshmallowgoop-30-day-kill-la-kill-challenge>

EPISODE 20: "I'M A GODDAMN MONSTER. JUST LIKE RAGYO!"





I wasn't particularly invested in *Kill la Kill* until after episode 18 first aired in Japan.

The huge twist ending with Ryuko's still-beating heart clasped in her newly-declared *mother's* fingers no doubt shocked and excited audiences everywhere. In my case, it'd been a good while since I'd found myself so on-the-edge-of-my-seat about anything.

But if I can tell you anything about being a fan at this time, it's that as soon as we got to episodes 19 and 20, so much of this enthusiasm vanished, replaced by pure annoyance. Ryuko's actions after this Big Reveal? Not exactly popular. Rejecting Senketsu? Running off on her own and falling straight into a trap? Ugh, she's lost her way *again*.

And I ain't gonna lie. It's irritating! Ryuko is our protagonist. We *want* to root for her, and when she does and says such awful things, it makes it difficult to do that. But as frustrating as this whole arc is as a viewer, it still only endeared me even more to her character.

Ryuko has always stood out to me in regards to characterization because of how deeply *human* she is (and not in the literal sense). She messes up. She has fears and insecurities. She can be cowardly and cruel. She may end up being nigh-indestructible in the end, but her superpowers never make her unrelatable or boring because beneath all that, she has such honest desires, doubts, and goals. At her core, what she wants more than anything can be boiled down to love. And who doesn't want to be loved, to be accepted, to feel like you belong? There's a reason a lot of the "I Want" songs in musicals work as well as they do. We want to "Go the Distance" with Hercules. We want to want Elphaba to meet with the Wizard (even if we ultimately know how *that* ends...) The desire to be loved and accepted is a universal one, and

to see it reflected in the characters we see helps create an instant connection.

When it comes to Ryuko, she's had a dearth of love in her life. Her father essentially abandoned her as a child, she was bullied and picked on and friendless at school, and even something as seemingly simple as a happy family dinner was a foreign concept to her before she starts living with the Mankanshokus. Episode 7 really highlights how much the love and acceptance of *family* means to her, as, when the Mankanshokus grow rich and greedy and leave her behind, she's more than willing to give up all that wealth in order to have it back. Come episode 20, she's thrown into a fantasy dream world where we see that her greatest desire is simple: a happy, normal childhood, with a loving parental guardian.

Where it gets complicated is Ryuko's fears. She *wants* all this—more than anything!—but does she actually deserve it? After all, she's never told why her father left her. Is it something she did? Something she *is*? Recounting her life in episode 8, she describes herself as a “punk”—a no-good juvenile delinquent. A *problem* who just picks fights and brings trouble to everyone. This only seems to get proven later. The first Drama CD¹ reveals that her beating of club presidents strips them of all their power and financial stability. And when it comes to the people she loves the most—her friends, Senketsu and Mako—she only seems to hurt them, too. When she goes berserk upon meeting her father's killer in episode 12, the whole following episode is spent in anguish because of what she had done. She'd hurt Senketsu. She could have hurt Mako. And what if she hadn't been stopped?

Ryuko distances herself from everyone in episode 13. She struggles to talk to anyone, she won't listen to Nagita praising her as a hero and an inspiration, and above all else she's *scared*. Not of Senketsu, who had unwillingly consumed her and transformed her into a monster, but of herself because *she* had made it all happen. He never wanted it, crying during the whole ordeal, and she couldn't stop herself no matter how much she knew it was hurting him. To bring so much harm to the people she loves, it's not hard to think that they'd be better off without her, and that she should remain alone.

There's a reason I included the images I did at the start of this essay. Prior to the Reveal, *this* is what Ryuko knows of the people like her. Ragyo is a monster—an inhuman freak. Even the Mankanshokus—*her family*—pitch in. What Ragyo is is gross and despicable. Nothing deserving of love.

So what happens when all of that is suddenly true for Ryuko as well?

The very people she calls family and her own blood sister think of those like her as abominations, and at first, she won't even believe that she *is* the same. She *can't* be like them. Nui and Ragyo are monsters, but she's human! She says this herself in the fourth Drama CD², and in her nightmares in episode 19, she clutches at her sheets, calling out to her father that *she can't*. If she is, it means all her worst fears are true. She *doesn't* deserve what she wants the most, and she never has.

Ryuko: I get pissed off when I look at you [Senketsu], you know that? Because you remind me of how stupid I've been!

One of the most interesting lines after Ryuko wakes up from her coma is this one. Senketsu reminds her of her own stupidity, which might seem an odd thing to say after everything she'd been shouting mere moments before. The root of her anger and despair initially seemed to be that Senketsu reminded of everything she hated about herself in that he, too, is made of Life Fibers. In that way, they're both monsters—irredeemable freaks.

But Ryuko doesn't truly believe that. She's always been quick to defend Senketsu against anyone who demeans him or finds him nothing more than a parasite—and often with her life. Notably, when Senketsu fears that he'll only consume Ryuko one day in episode 16, she doesn't hesitate to assure him that he's nothing like that. He's not what everyone thinks of him, and she's determined to make that fact known.

It's easy to say that Ryuko's suffering from Aesop Amnesia when she calls Senketsu a monster at start of episode 20 because of this. Hasn't she already learned that he's not? Why are we going through this development *again*? But the truth is, she's never viewed Senketsu that way at all. She was rather dismissive of him at one point, sure, but she never saw him as a terrible, awful parasite as others did; she even gives him a name as soon as they meet, because "everyone needs a name." If she really ever thought of him as, say, Tsumugu does, I can't imagine her doing something so humanizing as that.

Ryuko never thought poorly of Senketsu in the sense that she found him monstrous, so her sudden arrival at this point isn't retreading past character development so much as it's irrational. She knows Life Fibers don't automatically make a person all bad—she's always known that through being Senketsu's friend. By all means, she *shouldn't* have this outburst about them both being monsters. Thinking logically, she should know it doesn't matter

that she has Life Fibers in her because she's still the same, good person. Just as all the awful things people say about Senketsu aren't true, those things aren't true for her, either.

But feelings aren't always logical. Senketsu says himself (in the English dub) that Ryuko is "scared and confused, and she's lashing out because she's in pain," and by the end of her outburst, it's clear that it's not Senketsu she's upset with at all. Ryuko begins episode 20 (and ends episode 19) by declaring that "just looking at [Senketsu] pisses [her] off!" because they're the same, but right before she leaves him, she changes her words. It's not that they're the same that truly hurts her—in fact, I'd argue that she leaves believing that they're not the same at all. What really breaks her apart is that he reminds her of how stupid she's been.

Remember, Ryuko is horrified by the idea that she's no good for anyone, and that she's better off alone. While she's never struggled to see Senketsu as sweet and kind regardless of what anyone else says about him, she's *always* struggled with seeing herself that way. I think it's really important to note that after her initial connection between Senketsu and Life Fibers upon waking up, Ryuko takes all negative focus away from him. It's not that she's like *Senketsu*, her best friend who's always there for her, that brings her to tears. It's that she's like *Ragyo*. It's that she's unkillable. It's that she's just a weapon, a monster to kill monsters. It's that she really *is* no good for anyone.

No matter how much Ryuko wants to be loved and accepted, she can't help but wonder if she deserves to be. I've already mentioned her insecurities about this surfacing after her first encounter with Nui pushed her into a deranged, berserk state, but this isn't the only time it comes up. You also see it in episode 17, where Ryuko fears that her heroic and loyal defense of Senketsu's humanity was actually just her being selfish and scared—that she's *not* that kind, no matter how much she wants to be. Both times, she confides in Senketsu about her concerns, and both times, he reassures her.

Senketsu: When you were out of control, you did stop, and you did it on your own. That is why I'm not worried.

Senketsu: No, Ryuko. You got angry at them because you were standing up for me. That's the kind of person you are.

In each instance, he's telling her that he believes in her heart, that she *is* kind, that she's good. Later, when Nui taunts Ryuko in the fourth

Drama CD for being just the same as she is, Senketsu doesn't hesitate to comfort a terrified Ryuko, saying that she's the most human person he knows. Over and over again, Senketsu has been assuring Ryuko that she's absolutely deserving of what she desires the most.

But then she learns the truth. She feels used, betrayed, and lied to, and no matter how irrational or illogical it is, no matter how much she knows that Life Fibers don't automatically make you terrible, she can't help but feel she's just like Ragyo, just like Nui—and who can love them?

So let me return back to that interesting line, one of the last she says before she goes. Senketsu reminds Ryuko of her own stupidity. Why?

Because Ryuko's always wanted to believe him.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 25, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125023202445/i-wasnt-particularly-invested-in-kill-la-kill>

Tags put on a very early gifset I made concerning this moment: #can we just talk about this girl and this episode? #i mean here we have this rebellious teenage girl #who always wanted love and a family but was abandoned by her father for reasons she didn't understand #and she got bullied and took on this tough-as-nails persona to protect herself #but she's honestly just a total softie #and throughout the show we get to see her character develop #gaining confidence and learning to control her anger and becoming more selfless and fighting for others #yet even so none of that tackles what she needs to overcome the most: her great fear of being alone and unloved #so we get to episode 19 where she figures her whole life was a lie and her father only used her as a weapon #she thinks herself a monster and a freak that no one can defend #which just brings up all these problems #even nui's able to point it out in episode 20 that ryuko just feels so -alone- #so when she's screaming at the beginning of the episode it's just so sad that no one's proving her wrong #mako only says that she's not being herself and that senketsu is her best friend while senketsu can only manage to say her name #it's particularly heartbreaking when she accuses aikuro of always stringing her along and using her and laughing at this 'freak of a girl' #because even if that last part isn't true aikuro proves right here that he hasn't been giving enough consideration to ryuko's feelings #because you could say that they didn't stop her because she was threatening them but if they had gotten to know ryuko AT ALL #they would know that those were empty threats and she wouldn't really hurt anyone (well aside from nui and ragyo) #so she walks away without anyone attempting to stop her and falls right into a trap #where she gets brainwashed into getting what she always wanted the most: a happy childhood where she is loved #becoming exactly what she was afraid of in the first place in the process--a monster and a weapon that no one could love #freaking ryuko matoi everyone ; _ ;

1. https://www.reddit.com/r/KillLaKill/comments/21b3i5/drama_cd_vol_1_translationsummary/
2. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/94470325010/from-the-fourth-drama-cd-which-goes-more-in-depth>

EPISODE 20: RYUKO STABBING NUI



Is this shot of Ryuko stabbing Nui... attractive?

Well, to each their own and all, but... quite frankly, I see this as one of the saddest scenes in the whole freaking series.

I mean, I can't look at this without considering what's going on with Ryuko's character. By this point, she's finally accepted that she's not fully human—which she didn't at first, spending much of Drama CD 4 denying it¹—and she's also accepted everything that she thinks goes along with this. She's not human? She's a monster? No wonder Dad ditched her! No wonder she's never really had any friends before Senketsu and Mako. No wonder she was such a troublesome juvenile delinquent.

Essentially, she feels like she doesn't deserve anyone's love. A conclusion that is, quite literally, her worst nightmare.

After all, love is what Ryuko wants the most. There's how her entire quest is pretty much because she wants to grow closer to her father, there's the entirety of episode 7 where we really see how much family means to her, and there's what happens with the Junketsu brainwash scene later in this episode.

So, the idea that she can't have what she wants because she's some terrifying monster freak? Yeah. That *kills* her.

But nobody proves her wrong when she blows up at them. Senketsu doesn't know what to say because he's super naïve and inexperienced, and though Mako tries, she kinda says exactly what Ryuko doesn't want to hear by reminding her over and over again about just how much she's loved when

she feels like she can't have that. So Ryuko embraces this "monster" persona even more.

Liike you see in this moment.

Now, Ryuko's lost control in the presence of Nui before, but it's important to note that this scared her horribly and sent her straight into Heroic BSOD mode for a full episode (13). And why she was so scared? Well, a lot of things, but the main point seems to be that she'd hurt Senketsu by making him cry due to her actions. This is why she assures him in episode 17 that she won't lose control again, and it's also pretty much what she tells Satsuki in episode 15: she has people she cares about, and she won't give in to rage and hurt them from it because they matter more than anything else to her.

Ryuko's able to keep her cool with Nui in episode 18 exactly for this reason. She puts her friends above everything else, and she won't lose herself because that would hurt them, too.

But when you introduce this idea that she can't have friends, that she can't be loved, that they're better off without her—yikes. There's nothing holding back that rage anymore. She becomes exactly the monster she was so afraid of being.

Senketsu says in episode 18's extended preview² that "To kill as you please with a smile on your face is evil." Ryuko's doing exactly that here—or at least, she's attempting to. She's become some awful, wicked person that she's not because that's who she's convinced herself she is.

And I would really like to emphasize that she's not this. There's how quick she is to defend people she's just met (Mako, Nagita), there's her risking her life for her friends (Senketsu, episodes 5 and 16), and of course, just how much she values family and friendship. She's actually pretty sweet, no matter the rough exterior.

What this scene represents is her throwing all that away and becoming her worst nightmare. And I'm glad we're talkin' about it because gosh darn I get so many feelings from it, but can I just say that it's *really freaking tragic*?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 1, 2014, as a response to the opening sentiment URL:

<http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/98948902712/uzumakimi-so-kill-la-kill-episode-20>

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/94470325010/from-the-fourth-drama-cd-which-goes-more-in-depth>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx6ZJcx5jeY>

EPISODES 20-21: JUNKETSU!RYUKO

Is Junketsu!Ryuko still Ryuko? Or is she being brainwashed?

I lean towards the “brainwashed” side. Nothing Junketsu!Ryuko does is consistent with her characterization. Ryuko would never willingly kiss her father’s murderer, Ryuko would never just about kill her newly-discovered older sister who is actually on her side (as shown in episode 22, she’ll just want to punch her once, and not even hard, oh Ryuko), and Ryuko would never willingly hurt Senketsu or Mako. She may act tough, but Ryuko’s a big softie sweetheart and, true to the genre, a very *shounen* protagonist who really values friendship. Nothing she does as Junketsu!Ryuko or in the wedding scene is “her” at all.

Of course, she did push everyone away before the Junketsu incident, but I’d argue that it wasn’t to *hurt* any of them, but rather to *save* them from herself. She thinks she’s a monster and no good for anyone, and this is honestly her greatest fear of all because Ryuko wants love and a family more than anything. Episode 13—after she’d lost control and gone berserk upon meeting Nui—is a huge Heroic BSOD deal for Ryuko largely because she’d hurt Senketsu and made him cry by getting consumed by her own rage. Here, she also pushes everyone away—and that’s because she’s afraid of herself. She loves her family, she loves her friends, but she’s worried that she’ll only bring them harm.

At the end of the episode, Ryuko finally confides in Senketsu all these things and he informs her that *she* had, through her own willpower, stopped her rampage in episode 12 and that *she* was the one who got them out of their berserk state. He says he’s not afraid, and that’s because he trusts Ryuko and her heart. So in episode 15, Ryuko tells Satsuki that she won’t lose control again because she has to protect the people close to her and that they matter more to her than anything else. In episode 17, she tells Senketsu she won’t make him cry anymore, and is able to keep her cool in episode 18 when she meets Nui again for exactly this reason.

I’m making this way longer than I probably should, but the point is, Ryuko doesn’t want to hurt her friends one bit, not even when she’s pissed right before the whole Junketsu deal. She just has this mindset of, “I’m a monster, I’ve always been a monster, and all I’ll do is hurt everyone I care about because of it.”

It's also very much a recurring idea that Ryuko is *not* herself at all during this arc. Mako says this explicitly after she hears Ryuko blowing up at Senketsu, crying out:

Mako: The Ryuko *I know* would never say anything so horrible! She wouldn't, she wouldn't, she wouldn't! That's not the Ryuko *I know*! It's not, it's not, it's not, it's not, it's not, it's not, it's not, it's not!!

...to which Ryuko responds that Mako doesn't know her, and that "everything about [her] was a big fat lie," which I take to mean that it doesn't matter how much she loves everyone and doesn't want to hurt them, because her "true nature" is some evil thing and she can't escape that fact.

It is true, of course, that Mako responds to Gamagoori's warning that Junketsu!Ryuko isn't the "same Matoi you used to know" by saying that Ryuko is always Ryuko, but this has nothing to do with the Junketsu part—it's Mako saying exactly what Ryuko needed to hear all along.

Mako: No, you're the same old Ryuko you've always been! Even if you've got Life Fibers wiggling inside you, and even if you're super mad you're not human, that doesn't change a thing! You're still Ryuko, same as always!

This is Mako telling Ryuko, "It doesn't matter if you're some Human/Life Fiber hybrid, because you're still Ryuko." And who is Ryuko? Someone who is her best friend and who is kind. *This* is what Ryuko needed after her outburst in episode 20, but Mako said all the wrong things then (stuff like, "We love you so much!!" when Ryuko felt like she didn't deserve that), and Senketsu's a big inexperienced baby and didn't know how to help her.

In any case, this isn't Mako saying that Junketsu!Ryuko is Ryuko, which is even made clear with the wedding scene:

Mako: Take a look around you! This isn't you!

Mako's trying to appeal to Ryuko and snap her out of the brainwashing by telling her that her worst fears aren't true; she's not a monster, and nothing changes that. Senketsu also shares this mindset, saying that he

protects Mako because he *really* wants to protect Ryuko—the *real* Ryuko, who would never, ever in a million years willingly kill the people she cares about.

Ryuko's been taken advantage of in a vulnerable state, yes, but she's *not* herself one bit. She's not in her right mind, she's utterly brainwashed, and it takes one her greatest fears of all—that she'll hurt her closest friends (and *both* of them, not just Mako, as I see far too often)—to get her back in her right mind.

It's definitely an interesting arc, and I do wish the show itself had elaborated on it some more because there is *so much* here to explore, but I feel Junketsu is the main driving force behind Ryuko's actions in these episodes. It'd just seem really contradictory to the themes if Ryuko was somewhat in control here, since the series makes such a big deal out of Ryuko keeping it together for the sake of her friends.

What the Junketsu ordeal does is take this to another level and have Ryuko actually conquer her biggest fears and insecurities. She's learned that she has control and she can stop herself, so to prevent herself from ever hurting her friends again because of her “monster”-ness, she leaves them... only to be horribly forced into hurting them in the process. And once she *does* get out of the brainwashing? She risks death to be with one of her besties again, because, as the show's shown us time and time again, she's a super *shounen* hero and her friends matter more to her than anything else.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on February 13, 2015, as a response to a conversation concerning Junketsu!Ryuko

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/110959514192/i-have-a-kill-la-kill-related-ask-for-you-i-hope>

Additional commentary: As noted, this writing is only a piece of the discussion. The URL above includes the full conversation.

To add more, though, it is interesting to consider, of course, the argument that how Ryuko acts under Junketsu's control isn't *too* different from how she usually is. She's rude and taunting, hot-blooded and angry, as always. But with Junketsu!Ryuko, that's *all* she is. The *real* Ryuko? She's soft and sweet, no matter how much she tries to hide it beneath displays of rage and high-and-mighty attitudes. What Junketsu does is take away her *heart*, and with it, everything that *really* makes her who she is.

EPISODE 21: OPENING SCENE

Anonymous asked: I'm so confused remember how Ryuko was with Nui and Ragyo before she agreed to put on Jenketsu what happened why were they so touchy did they have sex or something and what was up with that kiss with Nui??

I haven't seen this around much, so it's probably not that popular, but my own interpretation for the opening scene (up until Ryuko overrides Junketsu—or perhaps more accurately, Junketsu overrides *her*) is that it's entirely metaphorical. It's simply too surreal for me to really take it literally, and the fact that it's pretty heavy-handed in its imagery adds to this idea. Speaking narratively, I don't see it as portraying the actual reality of Ryuko's situation, but rather the reality of her mind.

Whatever happened or didn't happen or metaphorically happened, this is a situation in which Ryuko is trapped. When I talk about the heavy-handed imagery, I'm mostly referring to this shot of Ryuko quite literally tied by red strings:



I'm really no expert, but from what I understand, the concept of the Red String of Fate¹ is pretty big in Japanese folklore, and it's something you'll often see in anime. *Kill la Kill* actually directly references it in episode 11:

Mako: It's the red thread of fate! The invisible thread that connects the pinkies of people destined for each other!

And that pretty much sums it up; the Red String of Fate is a thread that ties a person to their beloved—similar to the concept of soulmates. Normally this is a kind of cute and happy sort of idea, but *Kill la Kill* has a bit of a darker take on it, which you can see especially with Junketsu. Right from its very first introduction, Junketsu is established as a “wedding dress” that Satsuki is destined for. Much like the Red String of Fate, then, it means that Satsuki is fated to get married one day and have someone just for her. Pretty romantic, right? It even starts off optimistically—little Satsuki finds Junketsu the most beautiful thing she’s ever laid eyes on, and she can’t wait to wear it. But then her father tells her, “But when you put it on, you’ll become a slave to clothing.”

Not exactly the nicest thing to hear. It points out that while this idea of having someone just for you *sounds* sweet and all, it’s also incredibly restricting. From what I know of the original Chinese story, the thread between destined lovers can *never* be severed or cut... which erases a lot of your own free will. You’re essentially a prisoner to fate, and while this indeed may lead to good things, it also has some pretty negative connotations. What if you don’t like who you’re destined to? What if you don’t want to be destined to anyone at all? What about how *you* feel about all of it?

So that shot of Ryuko tied up by red threads? It emphasizes this concept immensely. She’s absolutely trapped, and even worse, she’s told that she should *want* to give up all her free will and stay that way. As Ragyo tells her, humans are *made* for Life Fibers, *destined* for them, much like how the lovers in the story of the Red String of Fate are meant for each other. It’s also worth noting that Ryuko’s implanted fantasy sequence in episode 20 ends with a *wedding* between her and Life Fibers that is described as the “ultimate happiness,” adding even more to this idea. According to Ragyo, you’re happiest if you just accept your fate without question, no matter how terrible this fate may be, or how much you don’t want it.

Going back to the original question, then, why have this incredibly disturbing imagery in episode 21’s opening scene? Because what’s happening in Ryuko’s mind *is* incredibly disturbing. She’s left powerless before these two women, tricked, abused, and manipulated into becoming their puppet—a slave to the fate *they* decided for her. It’s invasive, it’s disgusting, and above all else it is horribly, terribly *wrong*. Remember, Ryuko is the kind of person who is all about screwing destiny and doing what *she* decides—enough so that one of her most-quoted lines is when she says, “To hell with your

opinion! I'll take my own path, no matter what anyone else says!" And on top of that, back in episode 18 when she falls under Ragyo's control for the first time, she rips the controlling thread right out of her brain because she's so incredibly against being someone else's pawn. So to see her in a position where she's lost all that, where she's powerless and trapped and won't fight back anymore... it's heartbreaking.

Essentially, Ryuko has been robbed of everything that makes her *her* in the start of episode 21. She's become exactly what Ragyo wants her to be, which is why she obeys Ragyo's every word and why she kisses Nui. She's become so absolutely lost to herself that she does things she would never, losing all her freedom and personality to become nothing more than a pawn stuck in a state of fake happiness. This is noted directly later in the episode:

Satsuki: Junketsu is wearing *you*, nothing more.

Ryuko: And what's wrong with that? Being worn by it feels so amazing I can't stand it! Human beings were born to be worn by the Life Fibers. Being worn by 'em is a feeling you can't believe—the ultimate bliss!

Satsuki: It is the bliss of being a slave!

I've seen several arguments about how what Ryuko does under Junketsu's control does reflect her true feelings or personality, but I personally feel this misses the point. Unlike Senketsu, Ryuko doesn't *want* to wear Junketsu at all—she even says so explicitly in episode 23, screaming at Ragyo, "I'll show you what happens when you force me to wear shit I don't want to wear!" How it looks on her means nothing in regards to who she really is. She would also never in a million years go around kissing her father's killer, or threaten to kill Senketsu, or Mako, or even hurt Satsuki like she does. The point of this entire opening sequence—in my mind, anyway—is that Ryuko's completely and utterly lost who she is, becoming a prisoner to a fate she never decided.

As a final note, this scene is also a huge contrast to Ryuko's interactions with Senketsu. Though they too may have been fated for each other, Ryuko *never* wears him for that reason, but because she actively *wants* to because he's her best friend. This is why we see her rejecting him when she doesn't want to wear him, and why she's always herself when they're together. With Senketsu, Ryuko doesn't give up any of her free will or personality and

just accept him because some big force is telling her she *has* to; she sticks with him because she genuinely enjoys him and his company. So, on another level, I see this scene as also showing the difference between true happiness and the “easy” happiness. Just blindly accepting your fate may be the “easy” route, but it’s also tragic and manipulative and not true to who you really are. Challenging that fate can hurt and it’s hard, but it also means a lot more. Ryuko says this herself in episode 22 when she claims, “[Senketsu] feels way better, and way warmer, than that monster Junketsu ever did!”

And that’s how I see the scene narratively.

But of course, to address the elephant in the room, it’s gross. The *way* Trigger gets all this across is in really poor taste, and makes it easy to miss—at least what I think is—the point. Much like the notorious bath scene in episode 16, the whole thing feels a lot like a glamorized, fanservice-y representation of abuse, and it strikes me as completely disrespectful. But that’s an argument for another day.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on July 16, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/124286826470/im-so-confused-remember-how-ryuko-was-with-nui>

Additional commentary: For more on the Red String of Fate and *Kill la Kill*, see page 66.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_string_of_fate

EPISODE 21: CRASHING THE WEDDING

Okay, this is just something I've gotta get off my chest here.

I've seen a lot of posts lauding the crashing-Ryuko's-wedding scene at the end of episode 21, seeing it as very important and heartfelt. And why wouldn't it be? It's this scene that leads right up into the very *shounen* "power of friendship" moment in episode 22, which is so crucial to *Kill la Kill* that scriptwriter Kazuki Nakashima even commented¹ that it "was at this point when [he] realized that Ryuko was indeed leading the series as the main character."

By all means, the wedding scene *is* super essential for Ryuko's character, and, consequently, for *Kill la Kill* as a whole.

Just one thing, though. So often I see Senketsu's role and significance in it ignored completely.

And this, as it turns out, actually ends up mattering a lot in a narrative sense. The aforementioned "power of friendship" moment has Ryuko declaring this:

Ryuko: The word "friends" don't come close to covering it! They're something more, something I can't explain! That's what Mako Mankanshoku and Senketsu are to me!

Which means that, due to the events that caused Ryuko to break out of her wedding fantasy, she realizes that the bonds she's made with Senketsu and Mako mean far more to her than any perfect dream world ever could. They're not friends, but something much, much greater.

And this is crucial here: Senketsu *and* Mako. To focus only on Mako's contributions in the wedding scene—which I have seen time and time again—is a massive disservice to the story and especially to Senketsu.

Sure, Mako may do a lot of the talking when they crash the wedding, but Senketsu *is* there with her—and he plays a huge part, too. (Notably, it actually was only supposed to be Senketsu who went in there at all. Satsuki commands Mako just to make sure Senketsu goes, but Mako somehow gets sucked into it as well.)

In any case, though, the big point of interest is when Ryuko attempts to kill Mako, only for Senketsu to jump and take the hit instead. Senketsu spraying blood on Ryuko is what ultimately snaps her out of it.

There are a bunch of different ways this is taken. On the one hand, Ryuko's so shocked by what looks like the murder of Mako by her own hands that she wakes up. On the other hand, Ryuko realizes she could have killed Senketsu, which, again, is so horrifying that she breaks out of the dream.

But honestly, I don't believe either of these is quite right. With what we get in episode 22, the point is that Ryuko's embracing her deep feelings for *both* of these characters. Pinning just Senketsu or Mako as the sole reason that she breaks free of the mind control doesn't fit well at all.

So, what *does* fit? Easy. That she's hurting both of them. She literally cuts Senketsu, and this is obvious—it's incredibly unlikely that she thought she'd actually killed Mako. *However*, the blood spraying on her is presumably Mako's, considering Senketsu took some of it just moments before. Ryuko's then faced with the fact that she'd physically harmed one of her friends while being drenched in the blood of the other, and *that's* what I would argue breaks her out of it. She'd actually harmed Senketsu, and the blood is a reminder that she could have severely harmed Mako, too. Both are playing a big role here, which is exactly the purpose of having both of them there in the first place.

Perhaps what really rubs me the wrong way about the frequent portrayal of Mako as the *only* one of any significance who goes into Ryuko's heart/mind, though, is that it not only misses such a huge point of the episode, but also the series as a whole.

For the episode, I think this little tidbit of information is worth bringing up. Quoting myself...²

Oh! And for those who don't know, all of Kill la Kill's episode titles are based off of old Japanese pop songs whose lyrics loosely fit with the goings-on of the episode. Episode 21, where Ryuko is overtaken by Junketsu, takes its name from Hiromi Gou's "Incomplete" ("Mikansei"), which (supposedly? My Japanese is rather pitiful, and this is going off of what I've seen) describes a womanizer who had broken up with his girlfriend but then realizes that he'd abandoned his true love.

Which all kinda goes with what Satsuki's VA, Ryoka Yuzuki, said at the AX fan panel, which was that in episodes 20-21 Satsuki had sorta "won over somebody else's boyfriend." After all, Ryuko "breaks up" with Senketsu in episode 20 and Satsuki then gets together with him, but

by the end of episode 21 Ryuko comes to her senses, realizes her mistake, and risks death so she can be with Senketsu again.

Yeah, I'm joking about the shippiness of the situation, but the point still stands. The real crux of episode 21 is Ryuko getting back together with Senketsu, and this is why it ends with her forcefully tearing off Junketsu whilst declaring that she has to, else she can't ever wear Senketsu again.

Which is where I get to the "series as a whole" thing. This all makes perfect sense, because I would argue that it's this relationship that forms the heart of the show. And I'm certainly not alone in this:

From scriptwriter Kazuki Nakashima³:

I will say that there's no love interest, and **I wanted to make a form of intimacy that transcends love and species. It's about friendship.**

And from Ami Koshimizu⁴, Ryuko's voice actress:

Senketsu and Ryuko are like family, like friends, like lovers, are in a very comfortable/close-fitting relationship.

Had they both been human it would not have been possible for them to have this relationship.

I think that is what this wonderful work depicted.

Emphasis added.

My point is, for a fandom that's so very concerned about the erasure of significant relationships, I find it pretty disappointing that Senketsu and Ryuko's gets shoved aside and neglected so easily—I mean, I could really draw up a lot more examples than just this wedding scene (a whole hell of a lot of the OVA, episode 24's ending, the source of Ryuko's determination and resolve in episodes 14-15...).

To put it more into perspective, I often draw comparisons between *Kill la Kill* and the film version of *How to Train Your Dragon*. (Probably because both are huge favorites of mine, but just hear me out here.)

Both stories are centered on a rather forbidden friendship between a human and another creature that is deemed by the whole culture to be monstrous and deadly, yet the friendship prevails anyway against all odds, the strength of it so powerful that it ends up saving the whole village/entire

world. The human Hiccup states that he “saw himself” in the dragon Toothless, which is much like how Ryuko and Senketsu learn that they’re really no so different at all, both being “not human and not clothing.”

Both stories are pretty heavily relationship-driven, and both Ryuko and Hiccup have very important relationships other than with Senketsu and Toothless. For Ryuko, there’s Mako and Mako’s family, Satsuki, her father. For Hiccup, there’s Astrid, Gobber, his father, his mother. And these relationships all matter a lot, but it doesn’t change the fact that the focal point of *How to Train Your Dragon*’s story is Hiccup and Toothless and *Kill la Kill*’s is Ryuko and Senketsu.

Obviously *Kill la Kill* and *How to Train Your Dragon* aren’t just clones of each other and there are very huge differences between the two, but I think the point I’m trying to make here still holds up. To undermine Senketsu’s importance to *Kill la Kill* by ignoring him is like undermining Toothless’s importance to *How to Train Your Dragon*... which I really don’t see happening.

So, come on, fandom! Senketsu already got a disrespectful enough ending to his story with episode 24 and especially the OVA. Let’s not also disrespect him out of universe, too.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on November 29, 2014

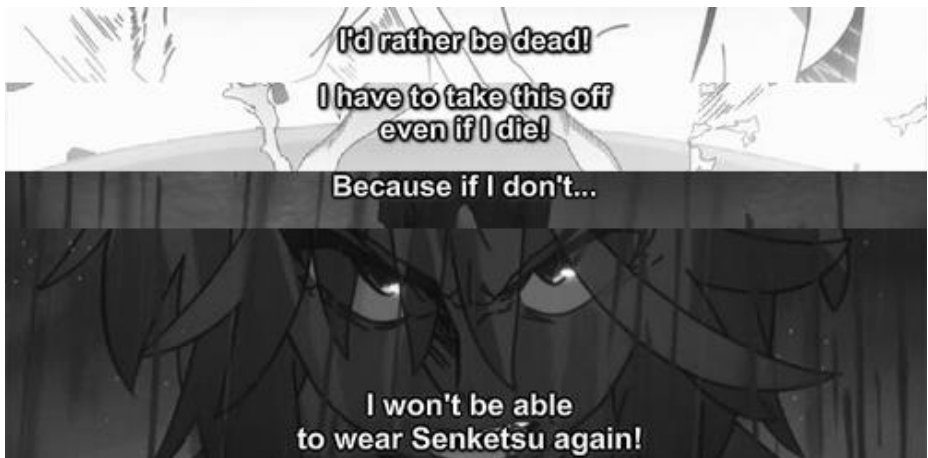
URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/103901555850/crashing-the-wedding-and-other-things>

Additional commentary: No, I don’t ship Toothcup.

1. <http://triggermagazine.tumblr.com/post/80242143414/trigger-magazine-issue-023-march-182013>
2. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/97786747490/h0saki-reblogged-your-post-and-added-great>
3. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/90923453499/from-the-anime-expo-kill-la-kill-panel-with-sushio>
4. <http://pastebin.com/DRStHfY>

EPISODE 21: “I’D RATHER BE DEAD! I HAVE TO TAKE THIS OFF EVEN IF I DIE! BECAUSE IF I DON’T... I WON’T BE ABLE TO WEAR SENKETSU AGAIN!”

Anonymous asked: Does anyone find symbolism in how Ryuko technically got naked for Senketsu (so she could wear him again)? You know, remember Mako's spill about how a woman only reveals herself in her full glory to the one she loves? Could there be a connection between this and their relationship at that point in the story?



Are you referring to this point at the end of episode 21, where Ryuko brutally tears Junketsu off her body (thus getting naked) in order to be with Senketsu again?

If so, I’ve spoken before (page 21) of some of the subtext you might read out of the scene:

...it’s also worth noting that the song episode 21 takes its title from—Hiromi Go’s “Incomplete” (“Mikansei”)—is all about a womanizer who had broken up with his girlfriend, only to realize that he’d abandoned his true love. (Supposedly. This is going off of what I’ve heard, so take with a grain of salt.) And what does Ryuko do at the end of the episode? She realizes that being with Junketsu isn’t real happiness, and she risks her life tearing it off so she can be with Senketsu again.

A couple of the voice actors (page 177) have even joked about it:

Ryoka Yuzuki, Satsuki's Japanese voice actress, commented at the AX 2014 panel that Satsuki wearing Senketsu in episodes 20/21 was like she had "won over someone else's boyfriend." [...] David Vincent, Senketsu's English voice actor, made a gag in the blooper reel comparing Senketsu seeing Ryuko wearing Junketsu as being like seeing a lover with someone else ("That whore! I'm taking my iron and leaving!")

Now, Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship is full of this kind of content, with how they constantly "become one" with each other's bodies, or Ryuko's joke that Senketsu didn't "cheat" on her with Maiko, or the mentioned Mako Theatre moment where Mako outright says that Ryuko wears Senketsu because she "loves him the most!" and thus trusts him with her whole body, or the entirety of "Suck your blood," and so on. This stuff is all very much *there*. But are we really supposed to take it all that seriously or literally? Do Mako's words in a moment of silliness end up speaking a greater truth?

To which I say... well, no, not particularly. Ryuko and Senketsu are incredibly close, they love each other immensely, but the real takeaway seems to be that this "love" doesn't have to be how Mako describes. Ryuko's "power of friendship" speech following the Junketsu incident is super refreshing in that it's *not* a love confession. *Both* Senketsu and Mako are "more than friends" to her, bringing across the message that you *don't* have to be romantically involved with someone in order for that relationship to be important. Maybe it's true that Ryuko and Senketsu are soulmates and Ryuko "loves him the most!" as Mako says, which definitely fits with Ryuko tearing off Junketsu to be with him again. But at the same time, you don't have to be *in love* with someone for all this to hold true. Non-romantic love can be just as powerful.

So, there definitely is a good deal of teasing and innuendo surrounding Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship—there's a reason I like them in a more romantic light! (Well, *many* reasons, but you know...) But it's interesting in that this is never pushed or forced, and that non-romantic love is given the spotlight.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 1, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/130257188045/does-anyone-find-symbolism-in-how-ryuko>

EPISODE 22: SATSUKI'S REALIZATION

10-seconds-flat asked: Something always struck me as odd in episode 22. What did Satsuki learn? She already knew humanity did not live for clothing, and she knew the value of friendship by having four dear, crazy friends. And yet she says "I understand now. People are not cut from the same cloth." Didn't she already know that?

But *did* she know the value of friendship? Truly?

Satsuki's realization in episode 22 is that she had been utilizing the very same methods as her mother... in order to *stop* her mother. And Ragyo's methods, as outlined in her theme "Blumenkranz," are to use people as tools and throw away anyone who doesn't prove useful. This is all illustrated in horrible clarity when she shrugs off the supposed death of her infant daughter when her plans to use said daughter for her whole world-destroying thing didn't work out. The child was useless to her, so the death meant little. As "Blumenkranz" puts it, "It is advisable to remove withered flowers."

Similarly, prior to episode 22, Satsuki wasn't treating the Elite Four particularly as *friends*, but as tools—*things* that would get her what she wants. This is especially evident regarding Uzu in episode 6, where she is hugely manipulative; she allows him to fight Ryuko and Senketsu despite knowing full well that he will lose, treats him like crap when he *does* lose (saying straight out that she "doesn't have time for losers" and that he's "pathetic"!), and, upon seeing that he's had his *eyes sewn shut*, she *smiles*, because this is *interesting*, and he'll probably prove more useful to her later because of it. None of this is any way to treat a friend, but at that point in time, Satsuki isn't focused on friendship. She has to stop Ragyo, and *that's* her main motive. At the cost of Uzu's humiliation and injury, she pushed him to become stronger and a better asset.

But does Satsuki have fond feelings for those close to her? Yes, of course. She's still human, and her hardass guise *does* fall before episode 22, such as when she stops Gamagoori's attempt at *seppuku* at the end of episode 9, or after Nui makes her appearance in episode 11 and she loses her cool so hard telling Uzu to get away that basically half the cast comments about it, or even when she essentially freaks out over Ryuko's safety in episode 18 despite claiming in her episode 22 speech that she had been planning to use Ryuko as a tool and nothing more the whole time.

What Satsuki realizes in episode 22 is that she can't expect to beat Ragyo and save humanity if she just *uses* people to do so. Humans are not simply mindless soldiers that can be replaced—they have feelings, and emotions, and they may be nonsensical and ridiculous, but that's what makes them powerful and special, and, in Satsuki's own words, beautiful. If *that's* what Satsuki wants to protect, that's something she also has to respect. She has to trust and love and, well, all that friendship stuff.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 31, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/145240907200/something-always-struck-me-as-odd-in-episode-22>

DRAMA CD 4: SENKETSU'S PROTECTIVENESS

Various snippets from Drama CD 4, which takes place after episode 18 (the episode in which Ryuko learns that Ragyo is her mother and that she's infused with Life Fibers). Clips are taken from tracks 3, 4, and 6, focusing on Senketsu's protective nature.

Transcript/Translation

Clip 1

Ryuko: *groaning*

Senketsu: Ryuko, are you alright?

Clip 2

[Sword slash; Ryuko screams]

Senketsu: Ryuko!!!

Clip 3

[Stabbing sound; Ryuko coughs]

Senketsu: Ryuko!!!

Clip 4

Translation for this clip¹ provided by mikiryuko

Ryuko: I... I'm human. I...

Senketsu: Ryuko... that's right. You're human. You're the most human person I know... I would know, I've been worn by you [all this time].

Clip 5

Senketsu (to Aikuro): Shut up! I don't care about that! Ryuko! Look at Ryuko! Help Ryuko!

Clip 6

Please take this translation with a grain of salt!

Senketsu: Mr. Mankanshoku, Ryuko. Please take care of Ryuko!

Sukuyo: Oh, Senketsu!

Senketsu: My words cannot reach any of you. But still, I'm begging you! Ryuko! Ryuko!

Aikuro: He was made for Ryuko. He's a very remarkable sailor uniform.

Senketsu: *sobbing*

Sukuyo: Okay, okay, it's alright.

Analysis

In regards to Senketsu's protectiveness, this Drama CD doesn't really introduce anything new. Much like Ryuko, Senketsu is a highly protective person, and this is clear pretty much right away. Senketsu isn't Junketsu. He helps Ryuko, doesn't want to suck her dry, and looks out for her safety.

It's just... he does this really *dispassionately* at first.

And that's (part of) what I love about Drama CD 4—it's a beautiful illustration of how far Senketsu's come. Because also like Ryuko, Senketsu starts the series off bad at expressing himself and how he feels. He calmly tells Ryuko that she's losing too much blood, unsynchronizes with her for her protection without so much as a word, bluntly advises her against wearing him when he fears she'll only get into danger if she does. It's all very mechanical, frank, and to the point.

But here? In Drama CD 4? Not so much. He's overflowing with passion. While he once only said, "You have this long until you pass out" when Ryuko was caught in a tough situation, here he asks instead if she's alright. He screams her name in panic when she gets hurt, whereas before he was very quiet about such things (regardless of how he truly felt about it). He's exasperated and hysterical when he speaks with Aikuro, completely losing his cool as he tries to get aid for Ryuko. He bursts into sobs in Sukuyo's arms. None of this I could picture happening with early-series Senketsu.

I guess the question is, then: What changed? To which I say: Not only is Senketsu's bond with Ryuko growing stronger, he's also *learning*.

After all, Senketsu comes into the world with a nice bit of know-how (and *oh my* does he like to flaunt it), but he has no memories, and no life experience. Stuff like actually expressing how he feels...? It's not something he quite grasps immediately. It's no wonder it takes Ryuko five whole episodes to really *get* that he sincerely and truly cares about her! And as the series progresses, as he grows closer to Ryuko and the human world, his

smart little comments become more observations—he’s interested in *understanding* Ryuko, interested in how her blood gets fired up when she’s excited, interested to know her heartbeat (her “sound”), interested in what relaxes and calms her, interested in why she keeps her feelings bottled up inside.

With everything else, this is all... probably a lot to take in. Maybe he doesn’t quite know how to handle it, and is overwhelmed by the rush of feelings he’s experiencing. There’s definitely a sense of that in Drama CD 4. He is overflowing with love and dedication to Ryuko.

And, well, I just can’t help but find it endlessly endearing.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on October 29, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/132141222580/various-snippets-from-drama-cd-4-which-takes>

1. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/94470325010/from-the-fourth-drama-cd-which-goes-more-in-depth>

TAG ESSAYS AND QUICK POSTS

EPISODE 2: “ARE YOU AWAKE?”



#no but is it weird that this is one of my favorite scenes? #i mean... #ryuko is so closed-off in the beginning of the series #she's not eager to make any friends #she just wants info #and yet she's so interested in getting to know senketsu despite all that #she actively reaches out to talk to him in the night because she can't stop thinking about him #and it's not 'cause he knows anything #since he suffers from amnesia and knows just as little as she does #she just... is genuinely interested in knowing who he is as a person #and that means so much coming from her?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 14, 2015, as tags on a gif I had made

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/121554110505>

EPISODE 9: BITING THE ROPES



I don't know about anyone else, but this part from Ryuko's fight with Gamagoori in episode 9 both cracks me up and kinda melts my heart at the same time.

I mean. You have these two nerds just *gnawing* on these ropes. They are so intense and serious about it. And while it's certainly rather sensible—that rope in the middle would probably hit Ryuko in the face if she didn't bite down on it—they are just *so into it*. And they didn't even have to say anything to each other about it! Senketsu wants to get sucked into Gamagoori's outfit to carry out his plan, but Ryuko doesn't know what he's thinking. She sees

him biting the ropes and she's just, "Wow okay I don't know what you're planning but I'mma bite it too."

And just. Ryuko trusts Senketsu so much that she goes and does this totally nonsensical thing without question, completely following his lead without hesitation.

It's so sweet and adorable, but I still can't help but kinda laugh?



Look what Senketsu does to protect Ryuko and assure they win this fight.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on December 17, 2015, and revised on December 18, 2015
URL:

<http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/135438016985/fuckyeahryuketsu-i-dont-know-about-anyone-else>

EPISODE 15: "THAT IS A FAIRYTALE."



Implying that you've formed a symbiotic relationship with the Life Fibers? That is a fairy tale.

#you know #i always wanted to see satsuki's feelings about life fibers further explored #she's grown up her whole life hating them and thinking them the most malevolent things in existence #so what does that mean for ryuko? #her sister? #who has life fibers in her but who she undeniably cares about and who she was fighting for all along? #and what does that mean for senketsu? #i mean she considers his feelings in episodes 20-21 #she's certainly not thinking him evil by the end #(and they would get along SO WELL i'm sobbing at the fact they only got to speak once) #just like... #did ryuko and senketsu's relationship change satsuki's mind about life fibers being wholly evil? #why and how and when did her perspective change??

Notes and Links

Originally posted on December 18, 2014, as tags on a gifset I had made

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/105553985445/implying-that-youve-formed-a-symbiotic>

EPISODE 21: “I’M UGLY?”



Fun fact: In the original Japanese version of this scene, Junketsu!Ryuko uses the word 醜い (*minikui*)¹ to describe Senketsu, which can be translated as “ugly.” This is also the term that fansubbers used, as seen in this translation by the Underwater subbing group:



I’m not quite sure why the official English subtitles and dub decided to go with “ridiculous,” but oh man *ugly* is just so much harsher, and it... hurts when you consider that Senketsu seems so concerned about being cute. (“Wear clothes cuter than me,” am I right?)

I mean. I kinda laugh at the scene, but honestly? It must absolutely break Senketsu’s heart to see Ryuko like this, but he dedicates himself to

keeping his emotions under control so he can save her. And here, when he asks her to come back to him, to stop this, she essentially replies with, “Nope, you’re ugly and I never want to be seen with you again.”

And the poor darling has *doubts*. He freezes up, and even though he’s well aware that she’s completely lost herself, he still begs if she really means that. Was everything they had just a lie? Would she really be happier without him? I especially love how the dub adds to this torture, with Senketsu insisting, “We were as *one!*,” a line not present in the original which all feels to me like Senketsu screaming, “We had something *special!*”

Like, it’s no wonder Senketsu starts bawling when Ryuko calls him warm and comfortable and says she never wants to take him off again in the following episode.



Notes and Links

Originally posted on January 31, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/138461669100/fun-fact-in-the-original-japanese-version-of-this>

1. <http://jisho.org/word/%E9%86%9C%E3%81%84>

EVIL EYESHADOW

Anonymous asked: How come when Ryuko wore Junketsu she had those orange markings under her eyes and Ragyo, I believe also got them when she put on that final goku uniform on the last episode, but they were purple. But Ryuko never had any markings while wearing Senketsu. Nor did Satsuki when she wore Junketsu or Senketsu Is it because he was a fake? If you don't know, do you have any theories about what it could mean?

Two words: *Evil eyeshadow*.

Maybe it's not as common a trope as it used to be, but villainous characters have a history of being associated with wearing tons of dark eye makeup¹. Similarly, when a good character "goes bad," it's not odd to see them suddenly having a lot more makeup. Or, if not makeup per se, they might have evil facial markings, or discolored, darkened eyes. Eyes are the "window of the soul" after all, so especially in animation, a good way to show a character's state of being is through the eyes.

As far as Junketsu!Ryuko and Ragyo are concerned, I'd say that the markings are just a visual shorthand to show that Ragyo is a villain, and that Ryuko has *become* villainous. So Ryuko wouldn't get this with Senketsu, since Senketsu's not bad at all! Similarly, Satsuki may not ever have evil eyeshadow because she's not really a villain.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on August 4, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/125909578445/how-come-when-ryuko-wore-junketsu-she-had-those>

Additional commentary: Yes, this trope has some Unfortunate Implications.

1. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ExcessiveEvilEyeshadow>

FIRST ENDING SEQUENCE VS. FINAL ENDING SEQUENCE



When Ryuko looks to the sky before she ever enters Honnouji Academy, she's imagining **what could be**. When Ryuko looks to the sky after it's all over, she's reminiscing about **what used to be**. In the end, she has everything she's ever wanted. But in a sense, maybe she's more alone than ever. She finally knows what it is to have someone who understands you completely... and she also knows what it is to have lost them.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on September 30, 2015, accompanying a gifset I'd made
URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/130233293558/30-day-kill-la-kill-challenge-day-30-anything-you>

IS JUNKETSU SENTIENT?

10-seconds-flat asked: I'm sorry for torrenting you with asks (this is the fourth already), but I have a question I didn't see you answering here. How sentient do you think Junketsu is? He has a mind of his own, I think, even if he is more... "primal" than Senketsu, but it's clear you can hear him screaming at the start of episode 22.

(2/2) Also, if we can hear Junketsu screaming in 22, do you think Satsuki could hear Senketsu screaming in 21?

Hey, I *love* rambling about *Kill la Kill*. Never apologize for giving me excuses to do so!

As for the question, it's... difficult. Officially, Junketsu has been stated to be “not sentient” at Trigger’s 2014 Anime Expo panel!:

Junketsu not sentient. Only Senketsu, so Satsuki couldn’t hear Junketsu. In final episode, every human could hear voice of Senketsu.

Yet, it’s also stated that Life Fibers themselves *are* sentient beings!

Life fibers are sentient life forms, have a voice and language but humans don’t understand them. Ragyo is exception, as she works as their messenger. Senketsu can talk because of Ryuuko’s DNA and can communicate with others due to her.

On a whole, Junketsu’s level of sentience likely hinges on how you define the word. At its most basic level, “sentience” refers to simply the ability to feel and perceive the world around you, and in this way, Junketsu does fit. Junketsu can clearly feel pain (hence the screaming), and does seem to be aware of what is going on.

But the way I often see the word “sentience” used is in relation to human-like awareness and qualities. And Junketsu does not appear to have that. In a general sense, Life Fibers seem to be very “primal” as mentioned, and it is only Senketsu’s human DNA that makes him an exception.

Can humans hear the Life Fibers scream? That’s a good question. It’s stated that they can’t be understood by humans, but screaming is pretty universal. Can people not hear their voices at all? I can’t say! I will note,

though, that Junketsu's scream might have been something for the audience only, a bit like Senketsu's speech, and not necessarily indicative that *all* the characters could hear it, too.

It's certainly interesting!

Notes and Links

Originally posted on June 3, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/145382014465/im-sorry-for-torrenting-you-with-asks-this-is>

Additional commentary: See argentdandelion's post (2 below) for more on this topic.

1. <http://forum.evageeks.org/thread/14370/Anime-Kill-la-Kill/1660/> (6th post)
2. <http://argentdandelion.tumblr.com/post/144424908111/is-junketsu-sentient>

SENKETSU AND ARMS

Okay but you know in *Steven Universe* where Steven's crying about how snakes don't have any arms?

Yeah. It's silly and there goes my snake bowling team and all that, but just. Sometimes I can't help but feel sad about similar stuff regarding Senketsu?

I mean, he *kinda* has arms, sorta. His sleeves are enough to get Tsumugu down to his level and have a delinquent stare-off, but, like, he can't really *hold* anything. When Ryuko is unconscious and needs his help, he's left completely unable to carry her. He has to use his sleeves to *tie a knot* around her arm so he can *drag* her across the ground, and has to put her Scissor in his mouth. And while he may be able to monitor her like a doctor can, he can't really bandage any of her wounds or provide basic First Aid. He has someone he's so determined to protect, but in a lot of ways, he really *can't*.

So just. Early designs¹ and concepts² where he *does* have real, visible hands when synchronized? It's just kinda sweet to me? Because while he and Ryuko constantly become one with each other's bodies and are so incredibly close, in the actual canon, Senketsu can't even provide the simple comfort of holding her hand—the closest he can get is his glove, and well, that's not exactly the same. He still might not be able to carry her or hold her in his arms, but, just. *It's something*.



Notes and Links

Originally posted on December 15, 2015, as extra commentary concerning one of the stated early designs for synchronized Senketsu, which had Ryuko and Senketsu holding hands (see 2 below)

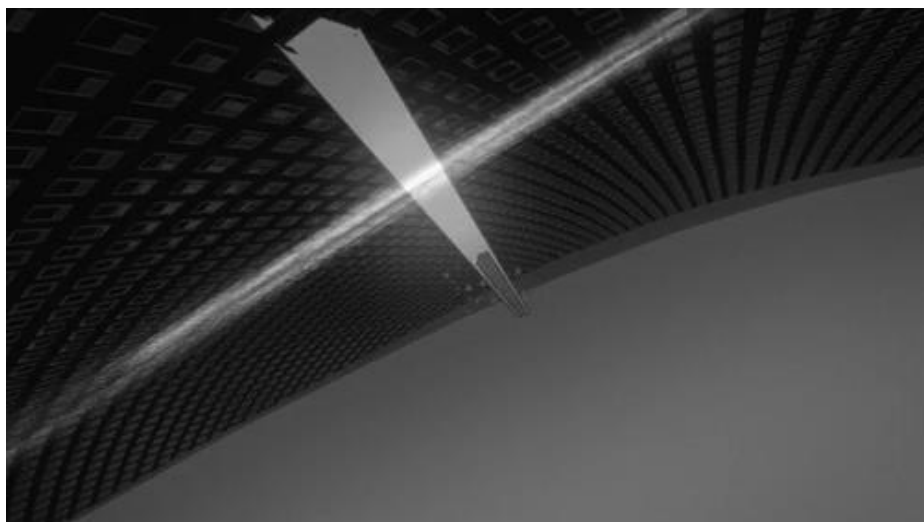
URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/135248985595/more-okay-but-you-know-in-su-where-stevens>

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/110188399145/ryuko-and-kamui-senketsu-designs-from-the-art-of>
2. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/135244696415/painxiii12-fuckyeahryuketsu-virotessfavoriteart>

SENKETSU'S GLOVE: HOW DOES IT WORK?

Anonymous asked: Hi, I was wondering if you knew how Ryuko's red glove thing works? I've seen KKK many times but I just don't understand how it's supposed to draw blood and feed it to Senketsu... and why it's considered a part of him later on (after he gets cut up by Nui and Ryuko has to get him back, Satsuki has the red glove and it apparently part of him even though it wasn't before)...?

As I've always understood it, the glove has a pin that, when released, activates a needle that draws blood and allows Senketsu to transform:



I wish I could be more detailed, but that's all I can really say about it! I'm not quite sure I fully *get* how it works myself, but I think a part of this show is to just... kinda go with things.

Still, to go on a little bit of a tangent, the needle part has always interested me, since Ryuko hates needles and is terrified of them—probably because of what was done to her as an infant. Yet, she still goes through this in order to work with Senketsu.

As for the second part, I too thought the glove being part of Senketsu all of a sudden was a big plot hole until I saw a post from *murasakidoku* pointing out otherwise¹. As it turns out, the glove *was* always with Senketsu—in fact, you can see it poking out of his sleeve as soon as Aikuro finds him:



Still doesn't explain why Ryuko never saw it or thought to put it on, but, well, I guess she's just impatient and not exactly the most detail-oriented, hah.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on November 26, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/134016611945/hi-i-was-wondering-if-you-knew-how-ryukos-red>

Additional commentary: This writing became part of a larger discussion. See 2 below for the full conversation.

1. <http://murasakidoku.tumblr.com/post/111782292665>
2. <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/134646771490/hi-i-was-wondering-if-you-knew-how-ryukos-red>

SUKEBAN DEKA

painfulelegy asked: In regards to why Ryuko might not be so embarrassed about wearing Senketsu while unsyncrhonized: while he is more skimpy than your standard seifuku, his colors and general aesthetics would fit in to some extent with Sukeban of the past. In that sense, the skimpiness would likely be overlooked for the raw threat an individual invoking the style of a member of the sukeban would offer. I would not be surprised if that was part of the reasoning for Senketsu's color scheme as well.

Yup, *Kill la Kill* draws a lot of influence from Sukeban culture—and media inspired by Sukeban culture. From what I understand, this is probably most obvious and overt with *Sukeban Deka*¹, which has numerous parallels² to *Kill la Kill*, though the biggest connection might be how the first ending sequence of *Kill la Kill* is very much a homage to one of *Sukeban Deka*'s ending sequences³.

The only odd thing is that Senketsu's skirt is really short, whereas the "classic" Sukeban look sports really *long* skirts. But apparently the midriff-baring isn't too off the mark; Claire Marie Healy notes in an article on Sukeban culture⁴ that "the sailor blouses were often cut short using scissors to expose bare skin at the waist." And when you consider that Ryuko seems comfortable with short skirts already when looking at her original outfit, you're right—it makes sense that she's not so embarrassed by regular, untransformed Senketsu.

Good point!

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 14, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/144341589350/in-regards-to-why-ryuko-might-not-be-so>

Additional commentary: See 5 below for more on this discussion.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukeban_Deka
2. <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/225692543/SukebanDeka.html>
3. <http://imgur.com/ddL09OZ>
4. <http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/28261/1/remembering-japans-badass-70s-schoolgirl-gangs>
5. <http://painfulelegy.tumblr.com/post/144366130529/in-regards-to-why-ryuko-might-not-be-so>

THE DISCOURSE

FOREWORD

Tell me if you've seen this one before:

"Such and such was bad, but do you remember when people called *Kill la Kill* feminist?"

If you're reading this right now, I'm sure you must have come across this sentiment at least once. ~~Personally, I think I see it at least once a week.~~ And it's not coming from nowhere. Back when *Kill la Kill* was airing, the feminist! vs. sexist! arguments were *everywhere*. I didn't even have to be a fan of the show to see this debate all over my dash. In 2013, it was a huge deal.

Nowadays, it's tired. Beaten to death. Everything that's been said about it has probably been said—and probably a million times over. There are countless articles, angry rants, anonymous confessions, eye-rolling chat posts.

So, why the heck should I even include a *whole section* for this stuff?

Well, honestly, I considered and reconsidered a lot. But at the end of the day, I just don't feel I can make a giant collection of *Kill la Kill* essays without bringing this up. It is *such* a big part of *Kill la Kill* discussion, and tired as it is, it's still very much relevant—and will surely *always* be. Media is important. When we have people dying¹ in allegedly *Fifty Shades of Grey*-style sex games, or when Peter Benchley (the writer of *Jaws*) dedicated much of his life to defending sharks² after his work sparked a widespread panic about the creatures, it's clear that media *matters*. It impacts reality, shapes what is "normal" and not, and artists must always be aware of this fact. What *Kill la Kill* succeeds or fails at with its portrayal of young women is something worth talking about, even now. There is merit and significance to discussing these things.

Buuuuut it's also markedly *not fun*. These are not the introspective character (over)analyses that fill up much of this book, and I'm also very much aware that not everyone cares for this kind of stuff. It's serious (enough so that I tag it as "serious talk" on my blogs), often gloomy and negative, and some folks want nothing to do with it. For that reason, all these discussions are placed in this one section of the book, for easy avoidance.

Unlike other essays in this book, the ones here may not match up so much with how I think and feel today. Many are quite old (and clunky!), and my opinions have since changed. However, I think it worthwhile to include *how* and *why* my thoughts have shifted, and for that reason will leave all the old essays intact, with extra commentary reflecting how I feel now.

So. Last section here. Fanservice, feminism, metaphors for puberty, and shipping wars. Seven parts.

Let's go.

(Or not. I understand *not*.)

Notes and Links

Please note that many of these essays deal with very sensitive topics, particularly rape and sexual assault.

1. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/swedish-man-accused-of-killing-girlfriend-in-fifty-shades-of-grey-style-sado-masochistic-sex-game-8470118.html>
2. <http://narrative.ly/how-the-creator-of-jaws-became-the-sharks-greatest-defender/>

KILL LA KILL AND FANSERVICE

This is a post I've been meaning to make for a while.

Because somehow, somewhere along the way, I fell in love with a certain over-the-top, emotional, ridiculous, nonsensical, incredible—dare I say “incomprehensible”?—show known as *Kill la Kill*. And just with that one sentence I already feel the side-eyes piling in on me, hear the angered accusations of the series' disgusting sexism and my own mind asking myself, “Aren't you a feminist?”

Yup, that's right. I'm talkin' *Kill la Kill*'s fanservice.

(Spoilers below, though I do try to be somewhat vague regarding later episodes and omit the *huge reveals*, for anyone thinking, “I want to watch this show but I'm not sure because of the fanservice...”)

A popular anime with a tremendous response, bringing up *Kill la Kill* almost invariably leads to engaging in this much-discussed debate regarding its fanservice, and there are so many different perspectives on the issue that you could probably go on for hours merely listing them. For the sake of brevity, I'm just gonna boil it down to what seem to be the two main opposing camps:

- One, which says that *Kill la Kill*'s fanservice regarding its female characters may be disturbing, but it is actually a deconstruction and works to empower women.
- And two, which says no, *Kill la Kill*'s fanservice really, truly *is* disturbing and so disgustingly misogynistic that the show is outright painful to watch.

The (main) source of all this hullabaloo, of course, is the battle armor worn by two of the leading ladies. Even our protagonist Ryuko describes hers as a “sleazy, midriff-baring number.”

覚醒ver



純潔ver



And they're definitely very revealing! But really, it's nothing new. Action heroines fighting in skimpy clothing is a trend we've been seeing for ages. What makes *Kill la Kill* interesting—and what undoubtedly helped urge this massive response—is that the anime actually engages in a discussion about these outfits instead of just letting these two duke it out half-naked (in a world where this is clearly emphasized to *not* be the norm) without a word about it.

Ryuko's arc from episodes 1-3 is where we get the bulk of this. Episode 1 finds her incredibly uncomfortable at the prospect of wearing Senketsu, her just-discovered superpowered uniform. She's so embarrassed that when she decides to use Senketsu's power to save her new friend Mako, she even covers herself up with a cloak so that no one will see.

Unfortunately, as it would happen, the cloak gets quickly torn apart in the heat of the battle, revealing instantly how scantily-clad our protagonist actually is—a situation which the show wastes absolutely no time having its other characters react to. Everyone in the crowd gasps, while her opponent is left completely flabbergasted and claims that she's "mock[ing] all sports!" Later reactions pretty much follow this trend and center on shaming her for her outfit. Mako's younger brother tells her, "Nobody in their right mind could fight like that!" In episode 2, a second opponent calls her a

“masochistic exhibitionist.”

And yet, through it all, Ryuko is still *massively uncomfortable* with this whole prospect of going out and fighting battles in Senketsu’s skimpy power mode. At near every comment she gets flustered and blushes, explaining that the way Senketsu looks is not her choice—heck, a flashback in the second episode relating to their first meeting has her trying (and failing) to pull him off as soon as she sees just what he looks like when activated. This all culminates into episode 3, where her main target Satsuki gets a uniform just like hers...but unlike Ryuko, she’s not ashamed by it.

Within this episode, the audience learns that Ryuko’s shame prevents her from using Senketsu’s full power, a problem the proud Satsuki does not share with her own skimpy, superpowered outfit Junketsu. As such, Ryuko spends a good portion of the episode just flailing around and getting beat up, to which Satsuki tells her one of the most oft-quoted lines in the series:

Satsuki: The fact that you are embarrassed by the values of the masses only proves how small you are! If it means fulfilling her ambitions, Satsuki Kiryuin will show neither shame nor hesitation, even if she bares her breasts for all the world to see!

An additional kick in the butt from one of Mako’s overzealous speeches helps Ryuko reach the epiphany that she must “get naked” and let go of her shame. Which she does, complete with triumphant dialogue between her and Senketsu as an upbeat J-Pop song plays and Ryuko’s rejection of her own embarrassment allows her all the power to put up a decent fight against Satsuki.

I point to this episode for really popularizing the claims of *Kill la Kill*’s positive, pro-feminist message. Even though I was not yet a fan myself, I too saw the many posts lauding the show come episode 3, celebrating female empowerment and other promising themes that are such a joy to see in the media. Yet, as with the series as a whole, opinions were—and are still—very divisive.

[Additional commentary: This is a very, very Western point of view. From what I understand, those in the West were practically the only ones getting “feminism” from this episode.]

Notably, most of the praise goes to Satsuki. She’s proud, she’s sure of herself, and she won’t let what anybody says or thinks get in the way of her *resolve* and ambition. Ryuko, on the other hand?

Ryuko is embarrassed. Ashamed. While she gets motivational speeches to veer her away from worrying so much about what others think, is it really right of the show to put her in a position of extreme shame and discomfort?

It's not an easy question to answer, and I honestly don't think there's a "right" answer at all. Rather, I see it as commentary, and actually...pretty meta.

There's a common argument that when a fictional woman wears skimpy clothes and people claim female empowerment and body positivity for her confidence in wearing said skimpy clothes, it's not actually empowerment at all because some writer or artist (who is probably male) designed that outfit and it's not really her choice to wear it. I have a number of problems with this argument, but mostly I just pose one question: is it within the woman's characterization to be comfortable scantily-clad? If not, then yes, I could see it being problematic.

The thing about *Kill la Kill* is that it actually addresses this concern. Both Ryuko and Satsuki are made to wear outfits to gain incredible power, and while Satsuki claims indifference, she, just as Ryuko, finds herself in something that is very revealing and sexualized that, judging from her characterization, she probably wouldn't choose to put on in any other circumstance. In this way, the show takes the issue of fictional women wearing next to nothing when it doesn't suit their character and makes it a plot point, concluding with a solid, positive message that says, "Even though I wouldn't normally choose to wear this, this is the best way to reach my goals and I won't be ashamed by that."

[Additional commentary: Of course, it *is* worth it to ask if this is really all that "positive" at all. Shouldn't we be *eliminating* issues of women having to publicly humiliate themselves to get what they want? Is this a crappy narrative all around that doesn't tackle the problem at all and instead says, "Life just sucks, get over it"? This is discussed in more detail on page 340.]

Which is another issue the show goes into in-depth: shame. The very concept of it is huge to the series, and it's pretty much exclusively linked to clothing. In episode 13, our Big Bad Ragyo delivers an ominous speech on the matter:

Ragyo: Indeed. Clothing is sin. When man ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, he became ashamed of his nakedness and covered his nethers with fig leaves. From the time humanity first

gained free will as human beings, it has been his fate to cover his body in the clothing called sin.

From here there is a theme of being “enslaved by clothing”—or, perhaps more accurately, being enslaved by the Life Fibers within clothing, which are explained in episode 16 to be parasitic aliens that essentially brought about human evolution through clothing them, with the main objective being to use humans as livestock and a food source. Episode 21 then gives a full explanation as to why exactly the Kamui—the superpowered outfits Ryuko and Satsuki wear, which are 100% constructed from Life Fibers—are as skimpy as they are: to prevent the user from being overtaken by the power of the Life Fibers within them, or, fundamentally, to prevent the person from being enslaved by clothing.

This revelation led to the common observation about the series that wearing less clothes=good and wearing more clothes=bad. Indeed, the more covered a Kamui is shown to be, the more villainous the character wearing it.

And this is all fine and good, but what does it really *mean*? What is the significance behind rendering clothing as shameful and sinful while simultaneously commenting on the shame associated with a lack of clothing?

One way to interpret it is to view the use of “clothing” in the series rather as a metaphor for society and society’s standards. The intense embarrassment Ryuko went through at the start of show regarding Senketsu and all the comments about him that she endures even later into the series feel pretty realistic. Most 17-year-old girls looking to find out who killed their dad aren’t gonna be happy about having to wear something even more outlandish than a battle bikini in order to reach that goal, and other people are surely going to tease her for it. But as Satsuki tells Ryuko, screw what society says if it’s gonna get you to what you want...which leads right into another point. Who says society’s right?

A typical sentiment I’ve heard throughout *Kill la Kill*’s run is that as you keep watching it, the shockingly-revealing outfits the girls wear matter less and less until you just get to a point where you’re not even noticing it anymore. Later in the series, characters—male and female alike—are running around in even less clothing than powered-up Senketsu and Junketsu, or they’re even completely stark naked, but you’re so pulled into the story and the characters that it...really doesn’t even matter. It gets pretty meta when there’s the realization that hey, shouldn’t we be focusing on who these girls

are rather than what they're wearing, and isn't it sad that so much of the discussion around the show is focused on their outfits?

[Additional commentary: I think it's fair to say that while you *could* read this out of the show, it was probably completely unintentional on the part of the staff. I am unsure of how much I agree with this anymore.]

Bringing this back to the first episode, I'm personally rather amused that Ryuko's first opponent is a boxer, an athlete that traditionally tends to fight in the equivalent of underwear. Yet I don't see boxers getting shamed for it, and in the show, *he's* the one shaming *her*, even though she's actually more covered than a boxer may be.

There's an active conversation around the idea of "revealing yourself to gain power" and what this means, but I lean more towards an interpretation entwined with this idea of society. Ryuko and Satsuki reject society's crap that they should be ashamed for actively fighting to reach their ambitions and should be personally degraded for what they wear. The skimpy Kamui designs reflect their refusal to be enslaved by clothing, and I see it also as a reflection of a refusal to be enslaved by society's standards. Nothing will stand in the way of what they want to accomplish, and that's a noble message worthy of praise.

Of note, however, is that *Kill la Kill* ultimately doesn't demean clothes and wearing clothes. The final episode features the two most prominent members of the rebel group Nudist Beach excited at the idea of finally being able to wear clothes again with the threat of Life Fibers gone, as well as Mako peppering Ryuko up to win the final fight by cheering her on to fight for "girls' fashion!"

So, wait, what is the show actually trying to say about clothing, society, and shame? I take it to mean that clothing isn't inherently problematic, and neither is society. It's when you let it control you that it becomes harmful. Wearing clothes should be fun—like the girls' shopping trip at the end of the show. It shouldn't be something to be shamed for and it shouldn't be a means to negatively judge someone; rather, clothes should be associated with freedom—the freedom to choose how you want to dress and style yourself. In this way, I see the destruction of Life Fibers as a metaphoric destruction of being controlled by clothing, and ultimately, being controlled by society. As Satsuki tells Ragyo, humans have their own free will. They should thus feel free, and not be enslaved by demeaning standards.

A nice sentiment, right?

Up 'til this point, I've been pretty positive about *Kill la Kill*, but believe me, camp number two up there definitely have some valid points. Fanservice is more than just skimpy clothes. Fanservice is also where the camera lingers, and...hoo boy.

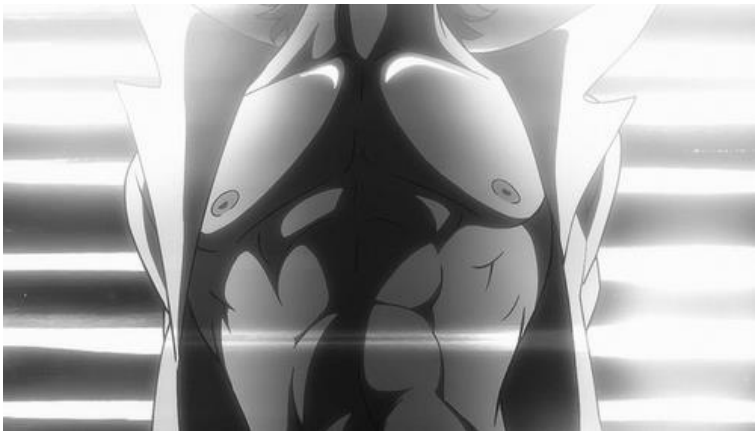


And these are just a few examples. Of course, there is a reading of the show that asserts Senketsu and Junketsu are so ridiculously skimpy that they're actually disgusting as opposed to sexy, working not as fanservice, but *fandisservice*. The outrageous designs, combined with the painful *snaps* as the girls' outfits fall into place during their transformation sequences, thereby work to make the outfits and everything about them seem creepy rather than arousing, perhaps as commentary about the concept of fanservice itself.

A part of me is inclined to fall into this line of thinking. After all, I just finished discussing how meta you can view *Kill la Kill*. But more and more I'm convinced that this idea of fandisservice simply isn't the case. A browsing of *Trigger Magazine*¹ will garner a pile of fanservice key frames, along with commentary gushing about the perfection of the female bodies pictured in them. While it's true that I hold little to no value in author's intent, there's no doubt that the show is definitely full of glamorized and unnecessary shots of the girls' butts and breasts. Is this demeaning? Dehumanizing? I don't really know, but I do understand the discomfort people feel for the inclusion.

[Additional commentary: I will say that what is most disturbing about it, though, is that these girls are *teenagers*. That is probably one of my biggest complaints with *Kill la Kill*—the way it oversexualizes *teenagers*.]

That said, *Kill la Kill* does make an effort to also provide male fanservice, particularly with a certain Aikuro Mikisugi:



Yet, there is a stark difference between his fanservice and the fanservice of the women. It could be said that Aikuro also rejects clothing to fulfill his ambitions, but in his most fanservice-y scenes, he's *actively* stripping and posing in front of the camera. Compare this to Satsuki and Ryuko, who are fighting for a cause the best way they can and get ogled as a result, regardless

of their intentions.

Not to say that the men of *Kill la Kill* never find themselves embarrassed due to the uncovered display of their bodies. For example, poor Uzu Sanageyama:



But, this is clearly not meant to be titillating like the choice shots of the ladies in their Kamui are. His nudity is humorous, not sexualized—a whole ‘nother issue which reflects the truly problematic elements of *Kill la Kill*.

Indeed, what makes the show really questionable is its treatment of some sexual situations and themes, unfortunately mostly only in the first few episodes. Some moments of concern I list below:

- For one, there’s the meeting of Ryuko and Senketsu. Don’t get me wrong; I absolutely adore the relationship between these two and how it grows and develops (and I will ship it in the afterlife), but nothing will excuse his first introduction. He literally forces Ryuko to wear him against her wishes, and yes, this is exactly as bad as it sounds.
- Then there’s the behavior of the males in Mako’s family—her father, Barazo Mankanshoku, and her brother, Mataro (as well as their dog, Guts). The sequence that leads up to introducing the boys’ creepy attitude around Ryuko is also problematic. Said sequence involves Ryuko wearing an activated Senketsu, but she’s unconscious and left at the mercy of a group of boys who cheer, “Oh, wow! A nearly naked chick!” The screen fades to black (and I’m terrified to know what happens here; presumably Mataro saves her before they can do

anything, though this isn't confirmed), and once Ryuko wakes up, she finds a man breathing hard and leering over her. She punches him in the face and it's revealed that he's Mako's father, who, along with Mataro (and Guts), peep on her when she's undressing or in the bath in later episodes as she starts living with Mako's family.

- Finally, some of the early scenes involving Aikuro Mikisugi are also worrying. In another problematic piece from episode 2, for instance, Ryuko is knocked unconscious once again and gets taken in by Aikuro, her homeroom teacher...who proceeds to completely undress her (yes, leaving her entirely naked), and then goes on to both immobilize her and strip in front of her.

After all this, it's no wonder the show gets dropped early on for being sexist and disturbing. Yet, the problem here is not the inclusion of these scenes but rather the *treatment* of them. They're all Played for Laughs and treated as jokes when, had they been portrayed like Ryuko's embarrassment over wearing Senketsu, they could have had really positive messages. As it stands, these scenes say, "Of course it's wrong! But it's *hilarious!*" Which, as I see it, works to only help encourage bad behavior by passing it off as something humorous.

Let me elaborate on this. Starting with Ryuko and Senketsu, I'm both hurt and amused that his first scene is constantly used to bash his character, yet it's so *out-of-character* for who he is the entire rest of the series. Never again does he "force" himself on Ryuko as he does in episode 1, and you can see this in several episodes, including 13, 17, 20, and even as early on as episode 2, where Senketsu is awakened by Ryuko's blood (his source of power) and immediately begs for "more" much like episode 1... only to calm as soon as he sees her, never once forcing himself onto Ryuko.

The scene in episode 1 could easily be viewed as one where Senketsu is overtaken by primal urges (as he is freaking starving) and acts differently than he normally would as a result, but it's sadly not played in the creepy way that this demands, and even worse, he's never called out for his behavior or apologizes for it, despite later episodes cementing the fact that he truly, seriously respects Ryuko. It's all a real shame, because it could have been a beautiful moment of character development and emphasized an important point. While it certainly kick-started the plot, what Senketsu did to Ryuko

was not alright, and it shouldn't be treated as such. With a show that often discusses the idea of "losing control" or "losing yourself" ("Don't lose your way," amirite?), Senketsu's behavior in episode 1 could have also added wonderfully to the concept, but is regrettably neglected, leaving the scene as nothing more than a, "Haha, the sailor uniform is forcing a *person* to wear *him*!"

It's especially jarring when compared with the scene in which Satsuki first puts on Junketsu, who, unlike Senketsu, is completely monstrous and aims to overpower Satsuki. This scene is painful, disturbing, and uncomfortable—far from being treated as a joke. With this in mind, it's clear that the more light-hearted tone of Senketsu's scene is to paint him in a more friendly light... even though he's forcing himself onto Ryuko just as Junketsu forces itself onto Satsuki.

Likewise, the situation with Mako's family is pretty much always played as, "Lol, they're peeping on her and she punches them!", and the one time it *isn't*, the show ultimately doesn't take the scene far enough to say anything more meaningful than that Ryuko is lonely. Indeed, what I see as one of the saddest scenes in the entire series is when Mako's family become wealthy and get so consumed by their greed that they consequently neglect their adopted family member Ryuko, which means that the father and brother (and dog) refrain from their more favorite "pastime" of trying to peep on Ryuko when she's in a state of undress. With somber music playing, Ryuko steps out of the bath during the episode and says, sadly, "No, they wouldn't be out here..."

A lot of slut-shaming comments get flung at Ryuko for this part. But what the scene means to me is that Ryuko is so desperate for attention and love that she even values the demeaning and superficial "love" she gets from Mataro and Mr. Mankanshoku (and Guts) that comes entirely from her body rather than who she is as a person. A compelling idea, certainly, but it's not taken anywhere in the series itself. In fact, the boys' peeping is never brought up again... which could be a positive thing, if the behavior was played as wrong in the first place and they finally came to the realization that what they'd been doing was not "haha, yeah it's wrong" but completely invasive and disgusting. As is, the peeping is only utilized for comedy and as a symbol of Ryuko's family falling apart, which just brings up a whole 'nother host of problems.

Compared to other scenes in the show dealing with similar issues, this treatment is almost baffling. Just look at the interactions between Satsuki and

her mother, such as the notorious bath scene in episode 16, or what happens to Ryuko near the end of episode 20 and very beginning of episode 21. These scenes are full of what may be typically used as fanservice—female nudity, fondling, touching—but they’re all incredibly disturbing, uncomfortable, painful, and tragic. The series makes no joke about just how violating these instances are. Though the peeping is undeniably far from as serious, it’s disappointing it didn’t receive similar treatment that highlights how damaging it is to be subjected to such behavior.

[Additional commentary: This is one of the biggest arguments I *don’t* agree with at all anymore. While I’ve experienced similar situations to this myself and didn’t initially think of it as fanservice, once more, looking at *Trigger Magazine* reveals that... there *was* some “this is hot” appeal here. The Toonami edit of the bath scene is a much more respectful way of displaying abuse, leaving the implications, but taking out the “sexiness” of the moment.

[Largely, though, as stated in the episode 21 opening essay on page 284, it feels like glamorized, “pretty” versions of abuse, which is massively disrespectful and could have been handled a lot better. Because I didn’t *want* to see it this way initially, I didn’t, but I think it’s very clear now that there *was* sex appeal here that is... disappointing, to say the least.]

Much of the same [disappointment] can be said about the issues surrounding Aikuro. Episode 3 goes so far as to include him telling Ryuko:

Aikuro: I went undercover at the Honnouji Academy to try to uncover what the Kiryuins are up to. At school, you and I are teacher and student. Don’t make contact without taking precautions. Of course, you’re more than welcome to cross that line here.

Which he says, of course, regardless of Ryuko’s very clear and very apparent discomfort at his advances. An irritated response from Ryuko leads him to sigh, “You’re a 17-year-old who doesn’t know how to take a joke, I see,” effectively bringing up the key issue here. His nasty behavior is just comedy in *Kill la Kill*, leading many to *not* see just how problematic it is. In fact, the only couple from the series that seem to have any shipping AMVs are these two, despite Ryuko’s complete noninterest and how terribly uncomfortable she is shown being around him even at the end of the series.

[Additional commentary: To clarify, my issue is people taking these moments where Ryuko is uncomfortable and painting it as “cute” and “romantic.”]

Other moments of “bad behavior treated as comedy” also exist in the show. For instance, a couple of Mako’s imagination sequences involve her grabbing Ryuko’s breasts and taking off her bra, clearly without Ryuko’s consent, which is played as hilarious:



There’s also the crowd gawking and cheering at Omiko Hakodate, left naked after Ryuko defeats her in episode 2:



Or Maiko purposely pulling down Ryuko’s pants in episode 4 to create a

running gag of panty shots that give the Mankanshoku boys nosebleeds:



All of which I see as a shame, because with the aforementioned moments involving Junketsu and Satsuki's mother, *Kill la Kill* is clearly capable of presenting the mistreatment of women as the disturbing and violating issue that it is.

[Additional commentary: Well, maybe it's just a shame...]

Okay. So what am I really saying here? Well, evidently, *Kill la Kill* certainly isn't the most progressive, pro-feminist show out there. But am I upset that it's so popular? Am I ashamed that I like it so much? Not a bit.

[Additional commentary: Well, maybe a little...]

At its heart, *Kill la Kill* is one of the *shounen* anime I've had a soft spot for since childhood, *but* with female characters filling most all of the leading roles. In fact, the most powerful characters in the series are all women, both in terms of physical strength and social/political influence, and they're always regarded on the same level as men without question. Further, there's never any shaming of what's regarded as traditionally feminine—just look at the show's ending sequence, full of shopping and fashion. [Additional commentary: This may actually be considered a problem, though, from a Japanese context. From what I understand, gender roles are *very* strict there, and while “no shaming of what's regarded as traditionally feminine” may be positive from a Western perspective... not so much from the perspective of the culture this show comes from. Still, I don't think this invalidates the point of it being good to Western audiences—just that it's more complex.] The female characters themselves are both flawed and virtuous, making mistakes, apologizing for them, learning, growing, and changing. In terms of the art, they're all drawn to look unique. There's really no Only Six Faces syndrome in *Kill la Kill*, for the males or the females.

And this is so important. These ladies aren't different archetypes just meant to fall in the love with the dorky male lead. They're not just there to look hot and cheer on the hero. They're not interchangeable pretty things. No, the women of *Kill la Kill* are the protagonist and antagonist, the Hero and the Big Bad, the deuteragonist and the best friend. They run this show, and nobody ever questions that or demeans them for their gender. They take this genre of over-the-top action and say, "Hell yeah women can star in these!"

With so few female protagonists out there in the media—and let alone in field of action—it's great to see something like *Kill la Kill* where they're out in the main roles *and* they're treated like flawed human beings rather than mere plot devices or sexual objects. With *Kill la Kill*'s success and popularity, it gives me hope that we'll get more shows that prominently feature women like this, in all sorts of genres.

No, *Kill la Kill* isn't perfect. Yes, it has a lot of problematic elements. But it's a hecka lot of fun, with some truly lovable characters and even a handful of positive themes and messages in there. I'm happy it's popular—and I'm even happier that the concerns regarding it are so frequently discussed. Drawing more attention to issues so commonly overlooked is one step closer to getting a show that really *is* as progressive and pro-feminist as I wish *Kill la Kill* was.

And isn't that exciting?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on April 5, 2014

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/81808459039/lets-discuss-kill-la-kill>

Additional commentary: This was the very first essay I ever wrote about *Kill la Kill*...

1. <http://triggermagazine.tumblr.com/>

KILL LA KILL AND FEMINISM

I am a straight woman who likes Kill la Kill. but I don't try to harass others who don't and tell them they are "missing the point". The message I got from the show may not be the one another person got. and if a woman thinks something is misogynistic, who are a bunch of strangers online to tell her otherwise?

Well, nobody should ever go around *harassing* people for having a different opinion. Something that tends to get forgotten these days is that it's plenty possible to have a reasoned discussion. And hey, even if we're still on different sides of the spectrum at the end of it, you're not gonna lose anything from understanding someone else's perspective better—you'll only gain.

All that said, what gets me about the *Kill la Kill* talk is that we're all so eager to define it as either super feminist and empowering OR super misogynistic and disgusting. And life just ain't that simple. It's wholly impossible to label a work as either "sexist" or "progressive" and have that be an accurate representation of the entire thing, because it's impossible for every little aspect of it to be one or the other.

There's a lot of discussion rising up about the damaging nature of binaries, so why can't we extend that to the media we consume? Limiting something to *just* one label or another does nothing to help people. It discourages open thinking, and helps *encourage* closing off our minds to any varying perspectives. Which easily turns into hate, and that's no fun for anyone.

Now, personally? I love *Kill la Kill*. To pieces. But that doesn't change the fact that I totally agree with there being some really nasty, sexist things going on, particularly in the first few episodes. And I have nothing but sympathy for anyone who feels triggered or uncomfortable by these things. Just as you say, to harass them and say they're wrong for feeling that way because they're "missing the point" is both rude and unwarranted.

But at the same time, it also doesn't change the fact that the show's got some very respectfully-written female characters and that many, many real-life women have indeed been empowered by it. To laugh and dismiss them as "stupid Tumblr feminists" for legitimately feeling more comfortable in their skin thanks to *Kill la Kill* is just as rude and unwarranted.

At the end of the day, I see *Kill la Kill* as a show that's got both feminist and misogynistic elements to it... you know, like most every piece of media that's ever been in existence ever. I do think that the more feminist elements outweigh the more misogynistic ones (after all, the show's been noted to have a huge female fanbase, and if it really *were* such a clear-cut misogynistic piece of crap, I am about 1000% sure that wouldn't happen), but I totally see where people are coming from if they see it the other way.

And it's fine if they do see it that way! We can agree to disagree! Have a discussion! There's a lot to talk about with this show and a part of me is glad that so many people are doing so. I only wish we didn't feel the need to lump the show as either SEXIST! or FEMINIST! with no room for in-between. You're right in that we shouldn't be calling out other people as wrong for seeing something a certain way, but we can still open our minds up to other perspectives and chat about it respectfully.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on November 1, 2014, as a response to an anonymous confession

URL:

<http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/101541568787/magicalgirlconfessions-i-am-a-straight-woman>

Additional commentary: I don't know if I agree so much with the sentiment that the "feminist elements outweigh the more misogynistic ones." I would never really call *Kill la Kill* "feminist," and I *do* admit its sexism. But I do think that its wonderful female characters and focus on friendship make it worthwhile despite the nasty bits—there's a reason I've dedicated so much to this show even while admittedly being very *against* a lot of what it represents.

KILL LA KILL AND THE QUESTION OF CHOICE

So I know I've already written a 4,000-word essay (page 322) about *Kill la Kill* and fanservice, but one thing I don't think I tackled well in that is the question of *choice*. Some more thorough analysis on that point here. Also, **spoilers!**

In regards to this topic and *Kill la Kill*, the main issue of concern lies with Ryuko. Namely, that she's forced into wearing the skimpy Senketsu through circumstance and really has no choice in the matter. It's accept Senketsu or the plot can't move forward and she doesn't get what she wants. The pressure is on *her* to stop being embarrassed over the very revealing display of her body, essentially telling women to "get over it" rather than telling men to stop shaming and objectifying women.

It's an argument I've seen a lot, and one that I do think is a good point. But at the same time, I don't think it's quite accurate.

First and foremost, this argument suggests that the show portrays the shaming and ogling of Ryuko as something "right" and Ryuko's embarrassment as something "wrong."

And, sure. The ogling can be pretty comedic and not depicted enough as demeaning, but it's important to note that Ryuko is the main character here. She's not a random hottie that the male lead's lusting after in some gross, over-the-top manner that's somehow supposed to endear him to the audience for being a loser with no chance. She's not just some sexual object. She's a *character*, and not only that, but the *protagonist*.

Which means that, by the time Ryuko's wearing Senketsu, viewers have already spent a good amount of time with her, and—if the writing in the show has any merit at all—they should be intrigued by her story. Within that first episode the audience sees that Ryuko's badass enough to bite straight into a lemon, that she's full of drive and determination, that she's compassionate and desperate to unravel the mystery behind her father's death. She's a character with motivations and goals, so when she gets gawked at like some *thing*? It's downright nasty and uncomfortable. Viewers (should be) sympathetic towards Ryuko, so seeing her getting leered at and shamed is certainly *not* something charming, positive, or "right."

And we see over and over again how badly it affects Ryuko herself. She blushes furiously wearing an activated Senketsu, she has people question her very character for it, and she always has to fiercely defend herself.

If *Kill la Kill* is anything, it's self-aware. The world of the show definitely isn't a direct reflection of our own, but it is one in which it isn't exactly normal to go around fighting battles wearing what's basically the equivalent of a bikini, and it is one where doing that gets a woman criticized and goggled at. And that hits pretty close to home. These days, women get judged and demeaned for their attire all the time and there's a nasty mindset of seeing them as nothing but sex objects that exist purely for male pleasure.

Kill la Kill doesn't ignore this. It draws tremendous attention to the issue, even making it a major plot point, which then works to criticize why so much of modern society is like this in the first place. Again, we should like Ryuko! We know she's just doing the best she can to reach her goals, we know that she doesn't *want* to be dressed like that, and we know it isn't fair that she gets judged and leered at because she does.

And it is this focus on how Ryuko feels about wearing her fanservice-heavy outfit and how it negatively affects her that separates *Kill la Kill* from other works such as *Sucker Punch*. That film lends itself towards feminist readings by criticizing the sexism in modern media... but it does so by pretty much doing the same exact thing. *Punch* has sequences with ridiculous skimpy outfits and male fantasies, and while the director claims this is essentially a "Fuck you!" to gross fanboys¹, the fact remains that this isn't addressed in the film itself. It just *is*. None of the women question why they're dressed like that in those scenes and there's no reason behind it other than the metaphorical. So, it ends up being just like what it's supposedly condemning.

Kill la Kill gets a lot of defense for being a "satire of fanservice" and there's a lot of criticism that it's really not. I pretty much agree with that—the fanservice can be rather overdone, but it's still embraced. We get gratuitous ass and titty shots all the time that are obviously there to be titillating.

But where it's unique and different is how it actually addresses the issue of women fighting in outlandish and impractical "armor." It questions the outfits, it gives them (an admittedly ridiculous) reason, it shows how wearing them leads to nasty things for our leading ladies, and it even directly has Ryuko responding to criticism and pointing out how unfair it is, as in this scene from episode 9:

Gamagoori: You have the sluttiest uniform I've ever seen! How dare you come to school wearing that? It's disgusting, it's deviant, it's depraved!

Ryuko: What about your precious Lady Satsuki?

Gamagoori: Lady Satsuki's an exception!

Ryuko: What?!

Gamagoori: Her iron will and well-trained body are ideal and make anything she wears noble and pure!

Ryuko: Oh, come on! That's BS and you know it!

If the series really *were* saying that Ryuko shouldn't be embarrassed and it's all on *her* to "get over it," why include a scene like this? At this point in the show she's very comfortable with Senketsu, but we still get this moment where she explicitly calls Gamagoori out for his hypocritical nonsense. Even if she's not embarrassed anymore, this treatment is still not okay.

And that's not telling women and girls to "just suck it up and deal with it." That's not saying the judgment and criticism is *right* and *justified* and it's all on *you* to stop being offended because that's just the way things are. No, it's saying that anyone who insults you like this is gross and wrong and you should damn well let them know it. Ryuko's pointing out that it's utter crap for Gamagoori to shame her for doing the very same thing he praises Satsuki for—he doesn't know her story like he knows Satsuki's, and he has no right to judge her like that. Ultimately, it's saying to not let anyone else humiliate you for what you're doing because your ambitions and reasons are yours and you should be allowed to be proud of them.

Which is where I get to Satsuki's speech to Ryuko in episode 3 and back to that issue of *choice*. It is this episode that brought about an explosion of discussion in regards to feminism, largely because of what Satsuki says here:

Satsuki: Exhibitionist? Nonsense! To unleash the most power, this is the form a Kamui must take! You cling to the puritanical views of the masses, proving just how inferior you are! But I won't be ashamed. If it means I can fulfill my ambitions, I will bare my breasts for all to see! I will do whatever it takes, for I know that my actions are utterly pure!

On the one hand, she's saying not to care about what anybody else thinks about the skimpy outfits because those people don't matter. *She's* more important than any of that, and as wearing Junketsu is the best way to reach

her goals, she's not gonna be embarrassed by it. She's not going to let society's standards hold her back.

On the other hand, she's being utterly critical of Ryuko for feeling humiliated and ashamed when, well, Ryuko doesn't have much of a choice when it comes to wearing Senketsu. She doesn't like how revealing he is, she's not fighting like that because she *wants* to, and this so-called "empowerment" is like ripping off someone's clothes and screaming "FEEL EMPOWERED!"

Well, that's one reading, anyway. And it boils down to the idea that the series deliberately makes a situation in which Ryuko *has* to accept or she loses. If she doesn't stop being embarrassed, she doesn't get what she wants.

Which begs some questions. Is it right of the show to do this? Is it fair? Couldn't they have done about an empowerment message (if that's even what they're going for) in a better way?

To which I say no, it isn't fair. But we all know that common rhetoric: life isn't fair. There is injustice and inequality everywhere. To get what we want, we'll often have to do things we don't want to do and don't like to do.

And the idea that there are no choices in that is a simplification of the issue. There *are* choices. You can throw up your arms and stop. You can run away. You can try for an alternative. You can keep doing what you're doing, pushing through all the challenges and hardships that come with that decision. Honestly, to say Ryuko doesn't have a choice when it comes to wearing Senketsu feels to me like robbing her of her autonomy. She *does* have a choice—she can keep fighting with Senketsu, which grants her great power despite the skimpiness, or decide she won't put up with that and take him off. She has every right to quit and surrender, or heck, even come up with another plan of action.

Perhaps I give the show too much credit, but I draw some comparisons between it and City High's song "What Would You Do?" The song's lyrics form a narrative, telling the story of a woman who gets called a "ho" for doing what she feels she must to provide for her son as a single mother. A friend of hers in the music video² defends her.

"Put yourself in her shoes," she says. "Her man ain't even taking care of his kid. Man, *what would you do?*"

The song is hard-hitting and asks a lot of questions, but significantly here, it asks what gives these men the right to judge this woman. She's stuck in a terrible situation, they don't know what hells she's been through, and to

write her off as something despicable because she's doing her best to support her son is cruel. Stop judging her for this, it says. She "[wakes] up every day hoping to die," and yet she keeps doing this because she cares about her son. That is something very noble and honorable, but when these men look at her, they see only a dirty word and they shouldn't. They don't know her story, and just because a woman works as a stripper or prostitutes doesn't make her worthless trash.

(And to be clear, I do consider myself a sex-positive feminist. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a woman *wanting* to have lots of sex or being a stripper and she shouldn't be judged negatively for it if that's the case, either.)

So what about *Kill la Kill*? Ryuko and Satsuki also both have noble goals—Satsuki to stop her horrible mother, and Ryuko to learn the truths about her father who was stolen away from her. Satsuki probably wouldn't normally go around wearing something like Junketsu's activated state just any time—and we see that it's definitely *not* a fun experience for her—but she has ambitions and goals and she sees Junketsu as the best way to reach them. Wearing Junketsu has many adverse effects, but that's the path she decides to take because it looks most profitable to her.

Her speech to Ryuko in episode 3, then? It's presenting Ryuko with options. She can stop wearing Senketsu because what she has to sacrifice to do so is too hefty a price to pay—which is honestly quite fair, considering how much she gets beaten and humiliated—or she can press forward with him because she thinks the advantages outweigh the shit she has to take in the process. Or she can run away, like she already has in a few battles, and come back with another plan. Or she can flee and spend three years training in the mountains. Who knows? Satsuki's really asking her, *What are you going to do?*

"What Would You Do?" draws attention to the fact that it's not fair to think little of people for "acting like a ho," and I'd argue that *Kill la Kill* does the same thing. Again, it's very self-aware, and though I know there was criticism for the English dub script for including language like "ho" and "sluttiest," I will contend that yes, it actually *does* help the show in a more feminist sense because it is actively commented on and called out.

Fact is, that sort of language gets tossed around *all the time* in reality, often based on a woman's attire. Girl wears a skirt too short? Slut. You can see her bra strap? Ho. To ignore this in *Kill la Kill*—a show full of fighting in skimpy outfits in a world where that's *really* not the norm—well, that'd just

make it like *Sucker Punch*. People could say it's satire or commentary all they want (and hey, maybe it is!), but the series wouldn't ever actually be directly addressing the issues at all... which isn't exactly helpful or progressive because then it's pretty easy to wind up Missing the Point.

Okay, but do we really have to use the insults? Do we really have to show a young woman grappling with feeling like a “slut” for doing the best she can to learn more about her father? Going back to one of my earlier questions, couldn't they have done about an empowerment message in a better way?

Perhaps. Probably. We could have had a show where fighting in skimpy clothes is simply the standard—maybe even something honorable—never depicted as odd or deviant or depraved. Ryuko and Satsuki could have been completely comfortable the whole time, with nobody ogling them like objects but instead always seeing them as human beings and worthy fighters. The camera could have shot them respectfully—no unneeded butt and breast angles. And that's empowering, definitely.

But I don't think it's as hard-hitting as what we got. And with the oversaturation of stories with women being sexualized up the wazoo and wearing impractical clothing when they're supposed to be warriors, it'd be way too easy to see this as just *another* work that has women in minimal clothing purely for the sake of having women in minimal clothing. It's not directly addressing the issues, and I'd argue it's simply not as powerful because it's not.

What many probably *wanted* to see with *Kill la Kill*, though, is women who wear their skimpy clothes not largely due to circumstance, but because they *actively want to*, and who strongly fight against the criticism they get for it, always being shot respectfully by the camera. And, yeah! That would be powerful, body-positive, empowering. I wholeheartedly wish we got that *shot respectfully by the camera* part.

But aside from that, I can't really say whether or not the way the show ultimately handled this issue of *choice* and wearing skimpy clothing is any “better” or “worse” than that scenario. It may not be as obviously positive, but it still makes a compelling point.

Believe me, *Kill la Kill* can get pretty nasty and skeezy. I'm not going to defend Senketsu's first scene played as comedy, or the tired, disgusting peeping jokes, or the very unnecessary framing of so many shots with that focus on tits and ass, or Mako groping Ryuko all over and how we're

supposed to take that as cute, or a number of other things that bring down a series that I do really think has a decent cast of characters and a load of potential for some greater things.

And I wish these elements would stop being defended. A lot of those are issues with the anime industry in general and quite frankly, I think it's grossly problematic and what Miyazaki was talking about in this highly-discussed article³ from a while back. I'd be much more into anime if those sorts of things were eradicated. (And on another note, I know Trigger *is* capable of making works without it, as seen with their cute and wonderfully animated *Little Witch Academia*.)

But all the vitriol towards how *Kill la Kill*'s tackling the issue of *choice* seems a bit misguided to me. The show's very reflective of the difficult decisions life gives us, and *that's* what it's doing with the outfits. There are slut-shaming comments and dehumanizing behavior, but these things aren't presented as good; in fact, they're actively addressed and fought against.

And when Ryuko doesn't want to wear Senketsu? *She doesn't*. Senketsu doesn't force her. She always puts him on again of her own accord (see episodes 13, 17, and 21/22). She's shown happy to wear him even the very first time they're together because she appreciates the power he grants her; her issue is that people treat her like trash for revealing her body like that.

Which is realistic. Women don't enjoy wearing clothes like synchronized Senketsu because it gets them judged and mocked—and *Kill la Kill* outright *shows* that. While *Satsuki* may be critical on Ryuko for being embarrassed (which is more due to how she views it as a sign of wavering resolve than anything), the show really isn't overall. We see time and time again why Ryuko *should* be embarrassed, after all. We see how unfair and nasty the treatment she gets is, which helps beg the question, "Hmm, is it really right to judge women based on what they wear?"

Not only that, but the series does feature two situations in which Ryuko *is* completely robbed of her free will and made to do things she would never choose to. The first instance, in episode 18, is when her brain is overtaken by Ragyo. It is presented as very negative and features Ryuko *ripping the controlling thread right out of her brain because she won't be anyone else's meat puppet*. In episode 20, she's forced into wearing Junketsu in what's been called one of the most heartbreaking scenes in the entire series. By episode 21, she *rips it off in a shower of blood because she'd rather die than be forced into wearing that thing rather than her best friend Senketsu*. Both of these are

portrayed as Very Bad Things that were done to Ryuko, and both of them end with her taking her destiny in her own hands again. She won't let anyone else decide what she does—she makes her own choices.

You could say that in many ways, *Kill la Kill* is all about choice. One of the key themes of the series is that of destiny and breaking free of the path fate decided. Both Ryuko and Satsuki get thrown into this battle because of circumstance, and the show details their efforts to get out of it.

Yet, they always maintain their own will. We see Ryuko tossing off Senketsu when she doesn't want to wear him, and, in the end, she's wearing him not just for his power, but because he's her best friend and she likes being with him. She winds up going to stop Ragyo and saving the world not because she was essentially designed to do so, but because she's an incredibly *shounen* protagonist who cares a lot about people and knows she has the strength to save them. It's what fate had in store for her, but *she* chooses to go through with it for her own reasons.

(And on this vein, Ryuko's triumphant dialogue after she realizes she must "get naked" is really more about opening her heart to Senketsu than being unashamed of his skimpiness. She chooses friendship over what anybody else thinks, which fits another aspect of the series, which is the lonely Ryuko finding friends and family.)

Satsuki, meanwhile, actively chooses to wear Junketsu because of its power. No matter how much it hurts her, she doesn't reject it because she's dead-set on stopping her mother and avenging her father and sister. She doesn't do any of this just because her father told her to—she does it because *she* wants it. She decides to take this hard path because that is what she believes in.

Maybe it's not "right" of the show or "fair" of it to have power-ups come in the form of skimpy clothes, but much of life isn't "right" or "fair," either. *Kill la Kill* reflects that and asks what gives anyone the justification to think poorly of women based on their clothing by directly depicting the issues that come with revealing attire and presenting them in a negative light.

But above all, Ryuko and Satsuki are legitimate characters here. We're supposed to love and feel for them, and a common sentiment about the series is that the nudity stops mattering so much as it goes on because the characters and their stories matter far more. Effectively, that alone works as a movement against treating women as nothing but sex objects. Ryuko and Satsuki may go around scantily-clad, but they're more than their attire—and

we see that.

In no way is *Kill la Kill* some wholly positive, feminist, empowering show. Nothing truly is, and as far as this series is concerned, it's got a lot of problems and issues that really take away from that image. But I do find it compelling how it handles the issue of choice and do think it has a good message in that regard—one that many real-life women *have* found empowering, and one that I don't think deserves all the venom it's gotten.

What do you think?

Notes and Links

Originally posted on January 2, 2015

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/106899031952/kill-la-kill-and-the-question-of-choice>

Additional commentary: On a whole, I'm not sure how much I agree with this entire essay anymore, but I can't really say I exactly *disagree*, either. I *do* still think *Kill la Kill* is very much about choice and taking your destiny into your hands, and it's one of the saddest things to me how Ryuko is constantly portrayed in “anti” discussion as some helpless victim who's forced into things—because that's the exact *opposite* of her character!

As I once wrote, “I still can never get behind arguments about Ryuko being “forced” into wearing Senketsu with absolutely no choice in the matter because I think she absolutely *does* have a choice, and that you see this over and over again throughout the series. She takes him off when she doesn't want to wear him, and aside from Senketsu's awful first scene (which I've talked about at great length [on page 368]), he never forces her to. And when we have moments where she risks *death* to forcibly remove an outfit she doesn't want to wear from her body (Junketsu), or screams about how she'll never be *anyone's* puppet while ripping a mind-control thread straight out of her brain, this argument of being forced against her will to be with Senketsu simply does not hold water.”

Still, I would like to make clear that this *is* coming from a very Western perspective, and, along those lines, I understand that “sex-positive feminism” has a bit of a bad rap these days because it focuses on equality rather than reform. It's about women finding power and being powerful in the same way men are (sex, violence) rather than *breaking down* such systems because the systems themselves are the *real* problems. It's putting a Band-Aid over the issue—covering it up, but not curing it.

To which I say... perhaps? But that's such a simplification, too. At least regarding the body confidence and sex positivity, sometimes it's really not about *power*, but, well, just *not feeling like shit* about yourself.

It's true we need reform. But is it not a *way* to reform to have women *rejecting* the idea that they should feel ashamed about their bodies? To say *no* to the idea that they should feel terrible for doing what they feel they must? Isn't it breaking down the system to point out the unfairness of shaming and vilifying women for doing things men may be instead *praised* for?

Well, that's probably outside the scope of this discussion.

Still, as far as *Kill la Kill* is concerned, the point *never* seems to be about "skimpy clothes=power," but instead about *friendship*—which fights against the "you must have brute strength to beat someone" ideal—and breaking down society's standards. As I added in a later post:

...there *is* something that I'd like to elaborate on that I don't think I've done too much of before, and that's the implications of Ryuko's "acceptance" of Senketsu. It's a common argument that she's forced to accept him, that her embarrassment is treated as wrong and silly—and I've discussed these a lot. . . —but I want to take a step back for a moment. Senketsu *isn't* just skimpy clothes. He's a person, too, and that shouldn't be neglected in this conversation.

I've written before [page 82 and page 171] of the (intentional or unintentional) similarities between Senketsu's narrative and narratives of marginalization, and that's something to be *super* considered here. As I wrote in the "*Kill la Kill* and the Question of Choice" essay, Ryuko is "shown happy to wear [Senketsu] even the very first time they're together because she appreciates the power he grants her; her issue is that people treat her like trash for revealing her body like that." Meaning? In private, Ryuko has no qualms with how Senketsu looks, be it because she likes him and feels a connection with him once he explains himself, or if it's simply because she likes what he can do for her. She's just ashamed to be seen in *public* with him, since she knows what people will say and think.

Doesn't this sound familiar?

There are a *ton* of stories about people who keep friendships or relationships secret because they're afraid of how the world will react

if they're seen together. People could get bad impressions of them, think them evil, no good. Public images could get ruined. It could be downright dangerous and deadly. And Ryuko gets *all* of this with Senketsu. People think poorly of her and her very character when they see her with him. She's mocked and ridiculed. Tsumugu tries to kill her over it.

To quote myself:

"...I think the dialogue [when Ryuko and Senketsu first truly synchronize] really says it all:

Ryuko: I finally get it now. I need to get naked. Putting on a Kamui... means becoming one with you. It means you... becoming one with me! That's what it means to master wearing you! Isn't that right, Senketsu?!

Senketsu: Yes, exactly!

...

Ryuko: Now I feel it! This is what you're really like, isn't it?

Senketsu: Yes, this is our power!

Ryuko: I didn't know I was doing it, but I was rejecting you out of embarrassment. That's why you were drinking so much blood! And the more I pulled away, the more blood you needed to get closer! That's why it's working now, right?

...so many discussions on *Kill la Kill* change once you take into account that Senketsu is a person. Looking right at these words, **none of it is about accepting skimpy clothes**. It's about a girl who closes her heart off to everybody finally letting someone in, no matter what anybody else has to say about it. She realizes she wants to get to know and work with this person, even if it's hard... and significantly, she *never* just takes the insults and mocking that comes with such a decision, even openly arguing with Gamagoori about it in episode 9.

I don't know if Ryuko ever truly *likes* skimpy clothes, but she likes Senketsu and thinks he's comfortable because of *who* he is, not *what*. And I think that's really important to consider. The whole thing is a lot more complicated than just clothing when you factor in that those

clothes are actually a character, too.”

Emphasis added.

My point is, this scene seems to be a lot more about *friendship* overcoming all odds than anything else. It’s saying, “Ryuko would rather be friends and let this person in than care about how she looks with him to others.” It’s *not* saying she’s *wrong* for feeling poorly—and again, the scene in episode 9 where she calls out Gamagoori for his hypocritical nonsense is not treated as a joke—but saying that she values this person and her relationship with him more than what anybody else thinks of it.

And I think that’s... pretty sweet?

1. <https://filmschoolrejects.com/interview-zack-snyder-on-the-sexuality-and-fanboy-hate-of-sucker-punch-36287c94c6b0#.uv23be624>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LahcSFleKm8>
3. <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interest/2014-01-30/miyazaki/the-problem-with-the-anime-industry-is-it-full-of-otaku>

RYUKO'S EMBARRASSMENT

whinydevil asked: It's interesting to me that Ryuko, knowing full well how exposed Senketsu leaves her in that first scene, is super confident. She's alone, of course, but still. It's like she's a proud peacock in her underwear.

And it's only when people ogle her when she goes out in public that she seems to feel shame. I wonder if things would've been different if perverts didn't, well, perv on her.

In that first fight with Satsuki, I interpret that scene where she's struggling, sitting in the rubble and Satsuki's coming after her, as her being maybe more embarrassed that she's getting her ass kicked than her being naked. Or it's combo of both.





Ryuko is a character who's very concerned with her image. She puts a lot of effort into her “tough girl” persona, and tries to paint herself as someone who doesn't care about what anybody else thinks and who does whatever *she* wants regardless of what anyone else has to say about it. But the thing is, Ryuko—initially, at least—*does* care about the thoughts and opinions of others. A lot. In fact, this was even noted directly at the Connichi *Kill la Kill* panel of 2014¹, where it was mentioned that “Before my body is dry” (or “DON'T LOSE YOUR WAY”) is her theme because she “is a child who is easily influenced by others and thus loses her way quickly.”

And that's what you see here. Ryuko admits that she doesn't like getting undressed when other people are around, and that's because she's afraid of what they'll think. It's also why she's horrified when she first sees Senketsu's transformed state, and why she tries desperately to pull him off right away—no one can see her like that! She looks ridiculous! And—as the English dub puts it—she looks like someone who isn't *her* at all!



What's interesting, though, is how her attitude totally changes once Senketsu explains himself.



As stated, Ryuko's like a "proud peacock." She's no longer embarrassed and eager to be free of Senketsu. She's happy and confident, and seemingly ready to take on anything. And the swift change in opinion could be simply because she likes the power Senketsu provides her with and sees him as a means to an end, or maybe it's because she feels a connection with him after she learns that he's just as confused as she is, or maybe it's a combination of both, but significantly, when they're alone together, she's comfortable with him. Even though they've just met and it wasn't exactly a good first meeting (to put it lightly), she realizes, "Hey, you're not actually a bad guy at all and you just wanna figure things out like I do, so let's go together."

She's not ashamed when she's just with him, because he can't judge her for what *he* looks like. He can't demean her character and think poorly of her for his own appearance. But other people can and will, and it's an amusing character moment when Ryuko just pulls a cloak over the both of them without even so much of a word about it, as if to say, "Yeah, you're cool personally, but you know people can't see us together like this." ("Amusing" in... a sad sort of way, because Senketsu *doesn't* seem to know what it means to go around wearing something like his transformed state in public, and to him, he looks the way he does because he doesn't want to control Ryuko, simple as that.)

Anyhow, Ryuko, once more, cares a lot about her public image. So I think it's more than just *perverts* that make her embarrassed to be seen with Senketsu—it's also what people are inevitably going to think of her. And, sadly, she's completely right. She's called an exhibitionist, a slut, told she's a "cheater" for "using [her] sexiness to distract" her opponent... all of which

go against the image she’s created for herself—and the image she *has* of herself—which she explicitly states to Sukuyo. In the scene where she’s stuck in the rubble and losing hard to Satsuki in episode 3, the English dub really hits this with an extra bit about how she feels she “[looks] like a ho” with Senketsu, and I’d say it’s *that* that bothers her so much. Not only is she losing, but she’s losing *and* she looks like a person she herself wouldn’t respect.

I think it really says something that men can go around topless or engage in sports like boxing or swimming in basically the equivalent of underwear without anyone saying a word, yet as soon as a woman shows a little bit of breast, she risks getting totally shamed. (This is especially relevant in *Kill la Kill*, as Ryuko’s first opponent is a *boxer*—who might fight more “naked” than she does, and no one will bat an eye!) If there wasn’t such a stigma against women showing skin, and if women’s bodies weren’t treated the way they are, I don’t think Ryuko would have been as ashamed as she is, because she’s ashamed largely— though not *fully*, as she seems to also have some insecurities with her body, if her comment about undressing in front of people making her uncomfortable is anything to go by—because society has *taught* her to be ashamed and to associate “woman in skimpy clothes” with negativity and scorn. And Your Mileage May Vary (a lot) on how well *Kill la Kill* handles these issues, but the fact that it draws attention to it at all is pretty interesting, and probably why it’s garnered such heated discourse and debate.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 14, 2016

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/144340655635/its-interesting-to-me-that-ryuko-knowing-full>

1. <http://h0saki.tumblr.com/post/109042080430/connichi-kill-la-kill-panel>

Of all the “controversial” pieces in this book, I know this is probably the most so, especially among longtime fans. The fanservice arguments aren’t the only things getting discussed to death. So’s this.

And it’s important! I think we absolutely should talk about it, and that’s why I convinced myself to include this essay here with all these others. But when so much of this “talk” tends to be hate-flinging and insults and bashing and pretty much *the* worst shipping war I’ve ever experienced—and mind you, I was there for Zutara vs. Kataang—it’s... touchy, to say the least. This really isn’t something that’s *easy* for me to write.

Of course, I’m talking about the million-dollar question: Is Ryumako Canon?

Significance

Personally, I don’t put so much weight on the actual answer to the “canon” question, but rather on what this question represents. On the one hand, it’s absolutely tiresome and obnoxious that close, same-sex friendships are so often argued to be “not gay!” It’s annoying and irritating and gross that obviously-romantic interactions are covered up and ignored and glossed over, with long, winding essays and writings about how they *must* just be friends, and to see them as anything else is wrong, ridiculous, and silly—especially when male and female characters tend to get shipped when they so much as *glance* at each other (and sometimes, not even that much).

But on the other hand, isn’t it just as tiresome and obnoxious that there are arguments like, “They care so much for each other—they *must* be gay!”? Isn’t it hurtful to imply that *only* romantic relationships have such qualities? Isn’t it nasty that friendships are devalued, seen only as “worthy” if said friends are also in love with each other?

And that’s the real meat of the issue. What defines “obviously-romantic”? Where do you draw the line? In this case, it’s a back-and-forth that never seems to end, even all these years later—and here I am still writing about it myself.

That said, once more, I stress that this is something that is super important to talk about. Maybe there isn’t a right answer. Maybe there will always be that back-and-forth. But regardless, there is so much here to discuss, examine, and apply to our own works of fiction. Media matters,

representation matters, and I see a lot of worth in acknowledging that. Yet, I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that *this* whole ordeal leaves a sour taste in my mouth. It's not a fun conversation—even more so than the fanservice and feminism ones, I'd argue, because it's often just so much more *personal*. This whole conversation is irritating, and tired, and the same arguing, 'round and 'round and 'round.

So here's the *other* big thing: People are bitter and full of contempt over this, and well, I think so much of that comes from *how* it tends to get "discussed." Either you're a terrible, awful, stupid person for not seeing it as romantic, or you're a rude, delusional, rabid shipper if you do. Why can't we say, "I just want to explain to you my viewpoint and why I think it's hurtful if you don't think it's romantic" instead of, "People who don't see it as a romance are nothing but a bunch of stupid homophobes!"? Why can't we say, "I think it's cool if you see it that way, but I don't think there's anything wrong with seeing it another way," instead of, "God, you're so stupid and this is nothing but a flimsy headcanon!"?

Sheesh! Why does this always have to be so discriminatory and hurtful? Because let me tell you—insults and mocking and name-calling does *nothing* to get anyone to agree with you.

It's a really frustrating, awful thing to see, and takes away from the importance of this kind of discussion. It just gets written off as ridiculous wank.

And that's sad.

My Argument

As for the actual question at hand... well, if a whole lot of this book is any indication, my feelings are probably obvious, and I will say this: When we have Word of God outright denying¹ canon ships in the show ("THERE IS NO ROOM FOR LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS IN *KILL LA KILL*"), when the context of the supposed love confession is within a wild sequence that has also been stated to be *purposefully* animated very chopply because it's humorous and meant to be taken as a joke (see page 264 for more on this point), and when said sequences have *also* included Mako saying very similar, rather... romantically-inclined stuff about Ryuko and Senketsu (from calling them a "perfect match of human and clothing!" complete with little hearts to literally saying that Ryuko "loves him the most!" and clearly *like that*, as she talks about full-body nudity in relation to this)... I feel you really can't blame

the fans for not especially seeing it as a concrete, solid romance. If anything, blame the show itself, since, if the “unrequited, creepy, possessive lesbian” trope² that seems so prevalent in anime is indicative of anything, it’s that there’s this view here that two girls being together is something not to be taken seriously.

But this is discussed to death. I want to touch on what really *isn’t* here: namely, that these “canon” arguments tend to ignore so much.

Ryuko and Mako are canon because Ryuko is a loner, yet warms up to Mako so quickly... even though she also is quite quick to open up to Senketsu, and, indeed, perhaps even *quicker*, if Mako’s comment in episode 5 about Senketsu not being Ryuko’s only friend is anything to go by, and how her song on the OST, “Light your heart up,” is all about telling Ryuko that it’s okay to open up to her. Ryuko and Mako are canon because Mako is the “key” to getting Ryuko to relax... even though Senketsu is shown to share this power when they both save Ryuko from Junketsu. Ryuko and Mako are canon because Mako is the only one who can reach Ryuko’s heart and interrupts a *wedding* between Ryuko and a terrible suitor... even though Senketsu is with Mako every step of the way and plays just as vital a role. Ryuko and Mako are canon because Ryuko describes Mako as “more than a friend!”... even though she says the exact same thing about Senketsu. Ryuko and Mako are canon because they end the series romantically going off into the sunset... even though this moment is all about Ryuko coming to terms with Senketsu’s death. (And seriously, as explored in more detail on page 146, it really, really irks me when the ending scene of the OVA is tagged as “ryumako.” I just can’t see it as anything but incredibly insensitive—regardless of if you think they’re canon or not. She’s *mourning*, my goodness!)

See a pattern here?

Kill la Kill is so refreshing in a lot of ways because it *doesn’t* just have one character playing this role as Ryuko’s anchor to keep her grounded and focused, and by doing so, it shows that you don’t have to be romantically involved with someone in order for your relationship with them to be important. *Both* of Ryuko’s friends matter! *Both* of them are “more than friends”! *Both* of them can reach her heart and save her! And when this lovely, beautiful, progressive thing is completely ignored and forgotten, I just can’t help but find it really... *sad*.

Not only does this muck up a much-needed message about the value of friendship in a sea of stories utterly *obsessed* with romance, but it also denies

Senketsu as a character. His significance and importance to Ryuko is reduced—or absolutely and totally disregarded—in order to elevate Ryuko and Mako’s. *Senketsu*—who society shuns, who’s constantly belittled and disrespected and thought of as a monster, whose narrative is all about gaining respect for himself—is pushed under the rug. Isn’t this a powerful, poignant character arc? Isn’t this something to be celebrated? And though it’s silly and fantasy and this show is ridiculous, what do you think it says when a crucial character who doesn’t look conventionally attractive is so commonly discounted by fans? I mean, to make this more personal, like most people, I’ve struggled immensely with feeling confident in how I look, and was even told that the reason I probably loved Disney’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* so much growing up was because I connected to Quasimodo for not being as pretty as my sisters. So when I see characters who aren’t hot studs get brushed aside, it says to me that you only *matter* if you’re attractive, and that affects me in a deeply personal way. And honestly? If Senketsu *were* a beautiful human, I can’t imagine this sort of thing happening. His significance wouldn’t be forgotten.

Above all else, though, it simply does not work to argue against the erasure of important relationships whilst simultaneously erasing an important relationship in order to stress the importance of another. And when I can hardly make gifs or graphic sets that include Ryuko and Mako in the same frame without it invariably being tagged as “ryumako,” I question how much truth is actually in such a sentiment.



But of course, the *biggest* argument for Ryumako’s canon status is this right here. Two girls kiss on the lips and go on a date. And I mean, you can’t

really argue with that. It sounds horrifically homophobic to hear that and say, “Well, I don’t think they’re actually a couple.”

So why do I still maintain that you can’t really blame the fans for not seeing it as a romance, and that it’s ultimately left up to you as the viewer to decide how to view their relationship? Because this whole argument is missing something so crucial: *context*.

First of all, Mako’s “date confession” happens within one of her “Hallelujah” moments, and as stated before, these sequences are established as *jokes*. And maybe this is shitty here, and implies that female/female couples are nothing but stupid gags, but can you really blame the viewers for not taking this as a true romantic confession when *that’s* the precedent? And wouldn’t we want something better for such a thing, anyway? When we have the director believing that the best animation should be saved for the most crucial moments, wouldn’t you want a, “This may be my last chance to tell you I love you” confession to be beautifully, wonderfully animated—and don’t you think that’s what such a scene deserves?

That’s not to say I think anyone’s *wrong* for seeing it as a romantic thing, but I do think the context in question leaves it up to interpretation. Maybe Mako totally meant a romantic date and that’s why we got all that romantic imagery, or maybe Mako’s just being Mako and the romantic imagery is playing around with the romantic context of the word “date” without necessarily meaning it that way, since that’s the way these sequences tend to go (complete wordplay and puns). There are miles and *miles* of arguing about what “date” means and I think most who were there for it probably agree that it was the most exhausting thing *ever*, but regardless of words here, context matters.

Because, most importantly, if all it took was a kiss on the lips to be considered canon, then Ryuko and Nui would be canon, too... and I think it’s pretty clear that Ryuko does *not* like Nui in that way. If all it took was a kiss, then it wouldn’t matter if the kiss was wanted or consensual. And that’s just the thing. It *does* matter. The idea that Ryuko’s very overt discomfort here—pulling her lips away, her eyes huge and wide, her expression shocked and surprised and surely *not* showing any love or pleasure—is *romantic*? Yikes!

Let me return to the idea of the “unrequited, creepy, possessive lesbian” trope I brought up previously. In this sort of narrative, a woman is awful and horrible to another, showing no respect for personal space or boundaries as she pursues her in just about the worst way possible... and it’s usually played

for laughs. It's "cute" that another girl gropes her breasts. It's "funny." Fanservice. I've heard it argued that if the unrequited crush winds up getting returned in the end, this behavior then not only becomes Okay, but something to be celebrated and lauded. It's *good*.

And it's *not*. I cannot stress enough how much it's not. If a character doesn't understand that her breaking of boundaries and harassment is wrong, how can you expect her to enter a good, healthy, romantic relationship? Specifically with *Kill la Kill*, there are so many arguments about how if Ryuko and Mako had been a heterosexual couple, no one would be denying them as canon. For reasons I stated above I disagree, but more importantly, if Mako had been a man, would anyone cheer about or celebrate her Ryuko boob-grab in episode 3, or the bra removal in episode 5, or the many times she gets up in Ryuko's space when Ryuko is clearly uncomfortable by it, or, yes, even the highly-discussed nonconsensual kiss, and hail such behavior as Adorable and Too Good For This World? Men groping women's breasts are seen as disgusting. Men kissing women without their permission are highly vilified—just look at the discussions surrounding Bolin's nonconsensual kiss with Ginger in *The Legend of Korra*. (I remember a *whole blog* claiming he "raped her" being created after this.) I've even seen huge fans of the pairing admit that they would *hate* Ryumako had Mako been a man because of her treatment of Ryuko. Why is it any different if she's a woman?

That's not to say I wish to bash Ryumako. I'm horribly against the idea that we shouldn't have any *bad things* in our protagonists even if they're actively shown as *bad*, which is why I will never agree with articles like "Beauty-ful Inferiority: Female Subservience in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*"³ and will always dislike the criticisms that the documentary *Tough Guise*⁴ levels against films that exist to show the *destructive* nature of "what it means to be a man." In *Beauty and the Beast*, the Beast behaves badly at first—and it's *shown* as bad. In *How to Train Your Dragon*, which *Tough Guise* criticizes, the Viking culture's idea of needing to kill the dragons is wrong—and it's *shown* as wrong. Isn't there a lot of power in taking a Bad Thing and depicting it as a Bad Thing? Isn't there a lot of merit in such a story? One that says we may not be as right as we thought? That we should always be willing to change?

With *Kill la Kill*, I don't think anything Mako does to Ryuko is inexcusable, and I think there's a lot of worth in exploring how they both come to respect each other better. I think there's a good story in how Mako *doesn't* realize that her "cute" boob-grabs and bra-removals aren't cool, and

that she comes to this understanding. (I mean, she's never had any real friends before, and with *her* family...) I'm happy for anyone who relates to the two, who sees themselves in them, and who sees them as romantic, because I think there's a lot of love here and a lot of good things to explore and write upon.

What I *don't* think is good is how the narrative *doesn't* show Mako's behavior as wrong. It doesn't address this issue at all, but even worse, the fans hardly do, either. I see fanart and screencaps of Mako groping Ryuko's breasts and harassing her, full of laughing about it being funny, gushing about it being cute. "How can you not ship this?!" said one caption in complete seriousness. I see *cosplayers* posting photo reenactments—even animated gifs!

And it terrifies me.

Because I dated someone who treated me like Mako does to Ryuko. Groping my breasts in public, lifting my skirts to stare at my ass, touching me when and where I didn't want... and it escalated to things that *still* leave my heart racing even years later when I so much as see that name. And you know what? *I didn't realize what was done to me was wrong.*

And *that's* a problem. *That's* harmful. *That's* what I want to see talked about way more in this discussion. When I find so much laughter and joking about this kind of behavior, so much holding up of nonconsensual kisses as the epitome of a good romance, I can only imagine others going through what I did—and I already know that my experience is far from unique.

But at the end of the day, this whole discussion is just so *tiresome*. I wrote in the foreword for this section that I must see snide remarks about *Kill la Kill* being called feminist just about once a week, but I think I see even more snide remarks about, "Remember when Ryuko and Mako kissed on the lips and went on a date and people refused to see them as canon?" And in the same way that the feminism discussions are so simplified for mocking, so is this one. Rather than encourage people to think about these important issues, it just becomes a reason to spread hate.

And, from a personal perspective? I'm tired of feeling like I have to go deep into some personal story to "justify" my opinions, and tired of seeing a valuable friendship covered up and ignored and forgotten to prop up another as undeniably romantic, especially when said friendship may be considered plenty progressive in its own right (page 171).

Like, seriously, folks? While I'm kinda glad I'm just about the only Ryuketsu shipper who made a stink about this, I'm also kinda sad. Senketsu

wasn't even *considered* in this shipping war, when he and Ryuko constantly become one with each other's bodies, have half of the songs on the OST dedicated to them (including the only duet *and* the super raunchy, sexy "Suck your blood"), have an official card called "Senketsu's *Date* with Ryuko," have *several* of the Mako "Hallelujah" moments pushing them as a couple, and hug naked on the *final volume* cover?

Like, c'mon, while all this was going on, *my* OTP burned up in space.

Notes and Links

A synthesis of my posts and thoughts about this giant debate

Additional commentary: Though I ended this rather jokingly, I don't mean to dismiss the real significance of this issue. Representation matters a lot.

A big point I'm making, though, is that so does the *quality* of the representation. And when we have uncomfortable joke kisses used as "good" representation, I can't help but feel a bit irked. I understand there are very few examples of female/female pairings out there, and we should absolutely celebrate what's there so creators see that we want more. But you can celebrate these things *without* praising the *problems*.

There are many good things about Ryuko and Mako's relationship. But a pulling-my-lips-away, fantasy, silly, meant-for-laughs kiss isn't... really one of them, and I actually initially ended this writing really *heavy*, noting that it is so *tiring* to feel like a shitty person for thinking so.

But hey, that's just my onion.

1. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/90923453499/from-the-anime-expo-kill-la-kill-panel-with-sushio>
2. <http://thatdiabolicalfeminist.tumblr.com/post/121303366464/sarah-nevermind-tropes-that-need-to-die-the>
3. <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=lux>
4. <http://store.nexternal.com/mef/tough-guise-p163.aspx>

SENKETSU AS A METAPHOR FOR RYUKO'S PUBERTY?

Pet peeve: When folks try to defend *Kill la Kill* by saying that Senketsu is a metaphor for puberty and feeling confident in your puberty-affected body, because

- a) Ryuko is 17. *Seventeen*. She is well past the point of puberty being a big deal in her life. Concerning the menstruation argument, most girls get their first periods around 12-13 years old, and you're told to see someone if you haven't had your first period by the time you're 16. Ryuko is 17. (Also, not all blood sacrifices have to be a metaphor for menstruation. Just... saying.)
- b) This reduces Senketsu to nothing more than a symbol and totally denies him as a character, when, as the scriptwriter of the show pointed out himself¹, *Kill la Kill* was an attempt to “make a form of intimacy that transcends love and species” and is “about friendship.”

Which is exactly what the scene when Ryuko first synchronizes with Senketsu is about! Absolutely *none* of her dialogue is related to being confident in her body, but instead, “This is what you're [Senketsu] really like!” and, “I was rejecting you [Senketsu] out of embarrassment!”

It's, “I was ashamed to be seen in public with you because of what you are and kept pushing you away because of it, but now I'm done with that because I want to get to know you and work with you!”

It's, “You're more important to me than what anyone thinks!”

It's, “I want to be your partner no matter what!”

It's 100% pure and unadulterated *shounen* friendship.

Like, I get it. When you love a trashy titty anime like *Kill la Kill*, you often feel like you have to defend that position. But this puberty stuff *completely ignores* the real mushy-gushy, sweet and wonderful heart of it. By making Senketsu nothing more than an accessory that serves to make Ryuko feel better about herself, you miss that their relationship is all about overcoming prejudice. You miss that Senketsu is a *character*, a *person* who spends the series being called a monster, a parasite, no good—and who's

caring and loyal and kind regardless. You miss that he has an *arc*, *development*, where he goes from someone who feels undeserving of love and unimportant to anyone on any personal level to someone who understands that he *does* matter, that he's not just some *thing* but a *person* like anyone else. You miss that his friendship with Ryuko is criticized and laughed at, judged and mocked and ridiculed, and that they prove everyone wrong—that they're *good* together, and good *for* each other. You miss that it's not Ryuko gaining independence (which she already had a lot of, having lived on her own for so long) that saves the day, but *teamwork* from learning to let people in in her life. You miss that, as Ami Koshimizu (Ryuko's voice actress) pointed out², “Senketsu and Ryuko are like family, like friends, like lovers, are in a very comfortable/close-fitting relationship.” You miss that they're *friends*.

Don't get me wrong. I'm happy for anyone who feels more confident in their skin thanks to *Kill la Kill*. I can certainly see the appeal of kickass ladies with *real personalities* deciding their own paths to reach their goals and not taking any of the unfair, judgmental shit that may come with such a decision.

But the real crux of the series? The biggest take-home message of it? I can only see it to be friendship—illogical, nonsensical, ludicrous, ridiculous friendship that saves the day.

And that's something to be celebrated. That's something that kept me watching. That's something I want to see far more of.

And that's also why Ryuko and Senketsu hugging makes up the cover art for the show's final volume, and why that image is the main focus of the official site's³ front page.

And why it's really disappointing that Senketsu is so commonly seen as nothing more than a metaphorical, symbolic representation of puberty.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 10, 2016

URL: <http://marshmallowgoop.tumblr.com/post/144139242502/pet-peeve-when-folks-try-to-defend-kill-la-kill>

Additional commentary: I was sighing about this with someone, and she noted that it's funny this puberty obsession only happens with *girls*, making a comparison to the *How to Train Your Dragon* books and how Toothless is *literally* a metaphor for Hiccup's puberty, yet the fandom never really mentions this, focusing mostly on their friendship.

You know, the exact *opposite* of what happens with Ryuko and Senketsu.

And interestingly enough, I've made comparisons to (the movie incarnations) Hiccup and Toothless and Ryuko and Senketsu right in this book. I realized after that it *is* possible for a character to be a symbol *and* a fully-fledged character, too, with valuable, meaningful relationships. I also realized that it's not actually too uncommon for "puberty metaphors" to exist on older characters, such as high school senior Peter Parker in Sam Raimi's 2002 *Spider-Man* film, where Peter's "webbing" is, um, rather *unsubtle* in its metaphor.

Still, the "Senketsu as a metaphor for Ryuko's puberty" reading will *never* sit well with me, because so often he *is* seen as just that. He's not Ryuko's friend, but just a symbol of her loving herself. And when their friendship is *so* important and crucial and emphasized, it strikes me as so *wrong*. It's canonically put on the same level as Ryuko's friendship with Mako, and no one would be saying that *Mako* is a symbol of Ryuko's puberty. What makes Senketsu different?

Just because a character is not human is not a means to say they are a *symbol* more than a person (or even a symbol at all!)—at least, it *shouldn't* be, and especially not in a series that gets away from that trope so thoroughly.

Tags: #but concerning the argument #not only does it often reek of sexism #(ryuko's berserk rage = pms! erm... yikes. a woman can't get angry without it being 'pms' am i right?) #but it's trying to make klk seem good by... actually completely ignoring what makes it that way? #and what has been stated to be one of its biggest messages? #idk i'm just a 'lil tired of characters who don't fit into the norm being used as nothing more than lame plot devices #or exist solely to further some other character's development #and when you have this character who -isn't- like that #it's just... sad to see him interpreted that way anyway like it's a good thing? #i dunno man...

1. <http://nharime.tumblr.com/post/90923453499/from-the-anime-expo-kill-la-kill-panel-with-sushio>
2. <http://pastebin.com/DRStHFfY>
3. <http://www.kill-la-kill.jp/>

SENKETSU'S FIRST SCENE

blackwood-samurai asked: Hey, I've been thinking a bit about episode 1 lately. I'd like to ask your personal thoughts on the first time Ryuko and Senketsu meet in the basement. There's some controversy around that particular scene and would like your opinion on it. Thanks

I've actually discussed this a few times before (page 96 and page 211), but I've been meaning to do a more in-depth post about it! So...

I'll be frank. I hate this scene. A lot. There's a reason you'll never see gifs or edits of it on this [my *Kill la Kill*] blog. But it's not so much that it *happens* that irks me about it; it's the fact that it's utilized for comedy.

In his introduction, Senketsu acts exactly as you would expect Life Fibers to. He's monstrous, demanding, and forceful. He doesn't listen to any of Ryuko's pleas—in fact, he even yells at her to “stop talking”—and he makes her wear him completely against her wishes. This is gross behavior, unhealthy and damaging.

Of course, this sort of behavior is also totally and utterly against who Senketsu is. Senketsu is patient. He's understanding, and probably too forgiving for his own good. He listens and is considerate. He's quiet, rather timid, and wants desperately to help. He's probably just about the sweetest freaking character on this show. And he's also not exactly human.

So here we get one of Senketsu's greatest conflicts. He has Life Fibers in him, and—from what's given on the show—these are not especially nice. They hurt people, seeing them only as food and nothing more. They're aliens with only their own self-interests in mind. Senketsu is initially thought to be made entirely of these Life Fibers, and this leads to characters taking him as just the same as the rest of them: he's a parasite, he's a monster, and he doesn't care about Ryuko but just wants to eat her.

How he acts in his first scene is exactly this. I see it that he's overtaken by primal urges because he's hungry and desperate for blood, making him lose all his human sensibilities.

And honestly? I think this is something that Senketsu's incredibly afraid of. He has a pretty shitty sense of self for a good portion of the series, consistently being shocked whenever Ryuko calls him a friend or defends him, and the *why* for that I credit to the fact that he's made up of Life Fibers,

he doesn't see himself as human because he is, and because he knows that if he loses himself, he might hurt Ryuko... who he cares about immensely and who he's determined to protect. His love and devotion to her is pretty much what episode 5's all about, having him risk his life in defense of her, and we see later that he's *really* not fond at the idea of bringing her any harm.

I'll cite episodes 12, 13, and 16 in particular for this. In episode 12, Senketsu devours Ryuko because she loses her temper upon meeting Nui, which causes him great pain and makes him cry. In 13, when Ryuko refuses to wear him for fear of herself, he sounds so utterly devastated when he asks if Ryuko's afraid of him after what he'd been brought to do to her. In episode 16, after learning the true nature of Life Fibers, Senketsu panics when he's confronted with the idea that he's just using Ryuko for food. And even early in the series, he's utterly devoted to Ryuko, unsynchronizing with her in episode 3 to keep from draining her of too much blood, helping her get to school on time in episode 4, begging Ryuko not to wear him so Tsumugu doesn't come after them in episode 5, always advising her and trying to help her out in battle... I could go on and on with this.

So that first scene? That's something Senketsu is so incredibly afraid of being. It's probably his greatest fear of all, a fear that's even reflected in the battle theme "Before my body is dry" with the line, "So help me to stay focused so I don't fall apart." He really, truly doesn't want to be that forceful monster he is then. It's horrifying to him, and that's the way I think the scene *should* have been played—as horrifying.

And it's not like Trigger is incapable of this. The scene where Satsuki first puts on Junketsu is a scary, powerful scene that really shows the monstrous nature of Life Fibers. The scene where Ryuko is forced into Junketsu is also much the same—scary and frightening.

The only reason I can think of Senketsu's scene being played in the way it is is to show that Senketsu's not really evil, since the whole thing's treated as a joke. But... it's just so jarring. What he's doing is just the same as what Junketsu's doing. It's not funny in the slightest. Add in the not-so-subtle rape joke and it's plain offensive.

But it's not like this is an issue just with Senketsu's first scene. This is my biggest beef with *Kill la Kill* in general—it, like a lot of anime and media these days, has a nasty habit of playing off sexual harassment and abuse as something hilarious. Personally, I don't know why Senketsu's first scene is always used as the worst example of this, since it's shown to be pretty OOC

for him early on and he never acts remotely like it ever again.

Meanwhile, characters like Mako and Aikuro do similar things to Ryuko when they *are* in their right minds. Mako gropes Ryuko's breasts in her Hallelujah in episode 3, takes off her bra in the one in episode 5, and constantly invades Ryuko's personal space and grabs onto her when it clearly makes Ryuko uncomfortable (see the motorcycle scenes in episodes 8 and 17). Yet, this is seen as funny, cute, and romantic. Then there's Aikuro, who completely disrobes Ryuko in episode 2, immobilizes her with needles while she's naked, and flirts with her when he's her teacher and when doing such is completely inappropriate and brings Ryuko a lot of discomfort. And this, again, is seen as funny.

That's not to say that I want to bash on these characters or pairings. I just ask why it is that these scenes and behaviors are excused as funny and cute when they're very clearly not, while Senketsu's first scene is—as it should be!—almost universally agreed to be disgusting and uncomfortable. Ryuko and Senketsu are one of my most favored relationships in all of fiction, but I would never *dream* of saying that their first meeting is anything adorable or hilarious. I honestly find it frightening that a lot of similar behavior—unwanted touching and removing of clothing—is brushed aside and laughed at because the perpetrator is a sexy teacher or a cute girl.

Of course, Senketsu's first scene is a lot more intense, and I'm not stupid. I know exactly what they were referencing with it. It deserves to be controversial, and deserves to be spoken up against. But I think the hate against Senketsu for it is pretty... misguided, to say the least. Again, it's not that it *happens* that makes it so bad in my eyes. It's that we're supposed to find one of Senketsu's greatest fears hilarious. We're supposed to think it's funny that he's hurting Ryuko, when his character is so utterly devoted to her and so terrified at the thought of bringing her any harm. This is something that I see as really sad, and it's so disappointing that we don't get to see Senketsu grapple with it or apologize for it.

Now, “not being in control!” or “not being in his right mind!” aren't excuses for what Senketsu does, and it will always be awful and unacceptable. Even if he did apologize for it, it doesn't erase what he did, and I think it's a fair argument to say that you should stay away from people who have harmed you in the past. Personally, though, I don't necessarily believe in that. I think people change all the time. Who I am now is different than who I was five years ago, for better or for worse. It's the *now* that matters most to me, so in

Senketsu's case, he's pretty much a darling sweetheart for the majority of the series, which I place a lot more importance on than his actions in a terrible, OOC-introduction scene where he's overpowered by primal urges and not himself.

There's definitely something to the idea that some actions are unforgivable, but when it comes to Senketsu, I lean against that. Still, I'm not going to argue with anyone who does feel that way—that's just as valid as my feelings.

This got quite a bit longer than I intended. Basically, I hate the scene, but mostly because it's framed as a joke. As someone who has been subjected to sexual harassment, I can firmly say that there's absolutely nothing "funny" or "cute" about it, and I think it's really disappointing and gross that the show plays Senketsu's nasty behavior towards Ryuko in that way. Not only that, but it's just *so* against his character, and is thus something incredibly tragic to me. Had it been played as the nightmare that it is to Senketsu, I don't think the scene would be so widely hated, but instead seen for exactly what it is: a horrifying moment that must cause Senketsu great pain and fear.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on March 14, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/113667850920/hey-ive-been-thinking-a-bit-about-episode-1>

Anonymous asked: id love to love ryuketsu but its kinda... i mean he did rape her technically at the start??

I've actually discussed this issue at length on [the pages before this]. If you're curious in seeing more about the matter, I really recommend reading that.

But I didn't go too deeply into the terminology in that post, so I can do that with this response.

The question of whether or not Senketsu "technically raped" Ryuko is likely something that it is utterly dependent on what you define as "rape." From what I understand, laws vary *everywhere* about the issue. Here's¹ just one article discussing the confusion, for a small, *small* example of the problem. With a million different definitions about what counts as what and what counts as what *where*, the terms are blurry. Add in shaky and dangerous ideas about consent, and it's no wonder so many have to ask, "Wait, was I raped?"

I can only really offer you how I *personally* view this matter. My definition of "rape" lines up with a generic, dictionary.com² definition: "unlawful sexual intercourse or any other sexual penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person, with or without force, by a sex organ, other body part, or foreign object, without the consent of the victim." Applying this to *Kill la Kill*, then, I don't think it's fair to say Senketsu raped Ryuko. They did not have sex. He is not penetrating her. *In my personal opinion*, I think it's almost offensive to define this as "rape."

Is it a rape joke that's completely and totally disgusting? Absolutely. Is it what I would consider sexual assault? Yes. Senketsu removes Ryuko's clothing, gropes her breasts, and forces her to wear him when she doesn't want to. But I wouldn't categorize it as rape. It's like forcing someone into a bikini or a leotard when they don't want to wear it. Awful, yes, harassment, yes, but it irks me to call that "rape," which is something very serious in my mind that shouldn't be made light of.

But, really, I'm just getting into semantics. The real question is: Do you think Senketsu's actions are forgivable, given the situation? This is fantasy. Senketsu's created from parasitic Life Fibers that want to hurt humans—just take a look at Junketsu and what happens to Kinue. His actions in his introductory scene follow this line and are completely against his characterization for the entire rest of the show. He's clearly not in his right mind nor himself when this occurs.

I already wrote about that in the essay before, but seriously, I *personally* consider Ryuko and Senketsu's friendship to be one of the healthiest relationships *Kill la Kill* has to offer. It is very much a *growing* relationship and it becomes better and better as the show goes on—and it's certainly not perfect!—but there is *so much* trust and respect here, which I value tremendously.

I mean, these two *communicate*. When one has an issue with another, they talk about it. Ryuko throws on personas for enemies—and even sometimes around family and acquaintances—but she easily shows how she truly feels to Senketsu. They are open and honest around each other, and they value one another so much. Ryuko doesn't care what anyone thinks of them, defending Senketsu with her life and demanding he be respected as a person. Senketsu, meanwhile, is incredibly loyal to Ryuko and truly wants the best for her. In episode 3 he unsynchronizes with her so he doesn't make her pass out from blood loss, he warns her not to wear him with the threat of Tsumugu in episode 5, he drags her body to safety after the events of episode 18 no matter the difficulties that come with this, and so on and so forth.

It is also one of the few relationships in the series that really seems to be mutual all the way through. There is no idolizing for one by the other, they are described and cemented as *equals* time and time again, and their feelings for one another do seem even and matched. They work so well together for exactly this reason.

This all got very long, but in the end I figure it all goes back to the question I posed earlier: Given the situation, do you think Senketsu's actions are forgivable? Or if not forgivable, can he himself be redeemed for it? He is *nothing* like that first scene in all actuality, and Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship is built not on nonconsensual behaviors and violence, but on respect and understanding. *That* is why I value their friendship and why it means so much to me, but again—that's me! Any other feelings are just as valid.

All you have to decide, Anon, is how *you* feel about it.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 28, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/120157592575/id-love-to-love-ryuketsu-but-its-kind-a-i-mean>

1. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2011/02/whats_the_difference_between_rape_and_sexual_assault.html
2. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rape>

Anonymous asked: sorry! i meant sexual assault. not rape. my intention was to not make that a rape joke, or seem like one. my apologies if it came across as one.

I understand that the terminology is fuzzy. I didn't mean any personal attack with my response, and I apologize if I came off that way. I just *personally* am uncomfortable with categorizing Senketsu's actions in his first scene as rape. Others may very well have their own valid reasons for defining it in that way.

But if the issue is indeed sexual assault, this is a huge problem in *Kill la Kill* in more ways than simply Senketsu's introduction, since the show, unfortunately, falls into this common trend of playing off that kind of behavior for laughs. Other pairings with Ryuko share this issue, including pairing her with Mako and Aikuro. Like Senketsu, they both remove Ryuko's clothing without her consent, Mako doing this in episode 5 during her Hallelujah, and Aikuro doing this in episode 2 after Ryuko's defeat by the tennis club. Like Senketsu, Mako is shown groping Ryuko (episode 3 Hallelujah), and invading her personal space and causing discomfort (motorcycle scenes in episodes 8 and 17). Like Senketsu, Aikuro makes Ryuko powerless before him, immobilizing her with needles in episode 2 so she can't move while he "teaches her about her body" and draws her blood.

And believe me, I understand and think it's totally fair if Senketsu's behavior in episode 1 makes his relationship with Ryuko uncomfortable or unacceptable to some. But I also think that this conversation needs to be extended more often. Senketsu and Ryuko's friendship—and Senketsu himself—get so absolutely vilified in amounts that I don't see concerning Aikuro and especially Mako, which, *personally*, strikes me as unfair and a double standard. These characters also disrespect and assault Ryuko throughout the series—and when they're in their right minds, too.

Of course, I don't mean to accuse you of anything, Anon! I just feel that this issue is so, *so* much bigger than Senketsu and deserves to be talked about more. It really irks me that I retread this argument so many times whilst similar behavior coming from other characters is hardly called out, instead getting hailed as "cute" and "romantic." *In my opinion*, if you're comfortable pairing Ryuko with Aikuro or Mako and believe her relationships with them can grow and be healthy even after past instances of disrespect and harassment coloring their interactions (as I do!), then I don't see any reason

to think differently concerning Ryuko and Senketsu's relationship.

Notes and Links

Originally posted on May 30, 2015

URL: <http://fuckyeahryuketsu.tumblr.com/post/120275437285/sorry-i-meant-sexual-assault-not-rape-my>